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TROTT

AND HIS LITTLE SISTER

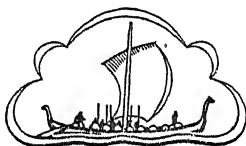


TROTT
AND HIS LITTLE SISTER

by André Lichtenberger



With an Introduction by Dorothy Canfield Fisher



Translated from the French by Blanche & Irma Weill

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INTRODUCTION

by

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

WHY should a thirty-year-old book about a little French boy and his baby sister be published in English and read by American fathers and mothers in this year of Grace? What we call "child-psychology study" didn't exist back in the dark ages of the nineties, when this tender pastel portrait was made. And without an acquaintance with what has been discovered about child psychology and about human psychology in general, how could anyone write a book about children that would be worth our important attention? And a little French boy! Such an old-fashioned little French boy, at that, "too perfectly quaint" with his ceremonious old-gentleman manners, his chivalrous feeling for women, his acceptance of the pious fable that babies are brought by angels from heaven, his utter lack of what we consider "inevitable" masculine self-assertiveness, his Gallic sensitiveness to decorum—what can he have in common with the rough-and-ready, much-loved little American barbarians in our homes?

He has in common with them the greatest quality there is. They are alive, and so is he. There are very few living human beings in books; only once in a while does a master of the art of fiction create a man or woman who steps out from the pages of a book to share life with us. And there are even fewer living book-children, because, so far, really accomplished writers have not had time for children in their own lives, and only accomplished writers can write good fiction. Pestalozzi and Froebel lived before Lichtenberger, of course, and other thinkers and teachers like them who made children the center of their thoughts and lives and books. But they were not creative writers. In books they can only expound and explain. They cannot set real human beings before their readers.

Lichtenberger was one of the first, perhaps the first gifted writer of fiction, to turn his talent to the depiction of childhood—not as an accessory to adult life, but as the vital stuff of creative writing. He was perhaps the first to use with little children the arts and devices of serious, respectful, attentive observation and divination which make possible the depiction of adults in fiction. And, of course, observation and divination are the two mainstays of what we think we have invented—child-psychology study.

So here is a living little boy for us to get acquainted with. If there is any French sentimentality in his portrayal, such as we wouldn't find in a modern American book on children, it is more than offset by the cool, energetic French

realism of the book, which we wouldn't find in an American book, either. If we find, or think we find, a few errors in the author's interpretation of the child's soul, it may be a salutary reminder to us that we, even we omniscient 1930 students of children's souls, may be making a few errors, too. In fact, since cocksureness is the most deadly and impassable of all obstacles to understanding, the warning against it is perhaps the most useful of all helps that we can have.

We find not only a living little boy, but a charming one; and to get charm into a book is even harder and less often done, than to get life. Trott is charming, lovable, and touching without stepping for a moment beyond the narrow limitations of a child's undeveloped personality. He is shown in one of the most difficult experiences human beings ever encounter, when he is being, for the first time, deposed from the baby's triumphant throning at the center of the universe. Perhaps nothing we ever live through calls more imperatively for a tightening of the reins of mastery over human egotism, for a painful conquest of magnanimity. Lichtenberger has felt—and makes us feel—the dignified elements of tragedy in the situation of little Trott's first stumbling steps towards maturity of character. As our hearts soften over the little boy struggling with himself, they will certainly open to a fresh understanding of the children around us.

And Trott's little sister! Never, in any book you may

read, will you find a more living human being than that baby. Was there ever before or since a more realistic portrait of the epic life-greediness, the monstrous egotism, the frightful indifference to others, the fatal irresistible charm of babyhood, than in these apparently gentle sentimental French pages? Trott's little sister is not merely a baby. She is *the* baby; the very despot before whom we have all bowed and trembled, rebelled and laughed and adored. It is wonderful to find her on the pages of a book, as living, as vital, as absorbing and dominating as she is in real life. May she find many an American parent to take her to his heart!

Arlington, Vermont.

Christmas, 1930.

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PART I

TROTT



Chapter 1

TROTT'S CHRISTMAS



JUST before Trott wakes up, something inside of him says, "It's Christmas!" and then, all at once he's wide awake. In a flash he is out of the little bed where he had gone to sleep so slowly the night before, thinking that tomorrow would never, never come. Like a dart he is at the mantelpiece where he had put his two small yellow shoes (for Trott is a little French boy).

He gives a cry and stands motionless in amazement; a drum, a sword, a gun, four boxes of soldiers, some candy, two picture books, all sorts of other things! And all for Trott! He spies his pretty mama watching him from the doorway and flings himself upon her, all happiness. She kisses him and says:

"Dear little Jesus has given you all these things."

Trott knows dear little Jesus. He is very small to carry so many things and how in the world does he manage to stay so clean and pink going down through so many chim-

neys? Mixed with Trott's gratitude is a profound admiration. He offers his heartfelt thanks but hurries to get dressed so as to play with his new treasures as quickly as possible.

Jane, his English nurse, opens the shades. It is a beautiful day. The glowing sun of Nice shines in at the windows; the blue sea flashes; the air is filled with joy. This beautiful, glittering Christmas day causes Trott's happiness to overflow. Almost impossible to wait to be combed and dressed! Almost impossible to stop for breakfast! At last he is seated on the floor close to mama, surrounded by all his new playthings. He turns them over and over, admiring them from every angle.

"How I wish," he says suddenly, "that my papa were here!"

Mama answers with a little sigh. Papa is on a big boat, and he is sailing far off somewhere, very far, clear on the other side of the world.

The doorbell rings. Jane comes in, carrying an enormous bouquet of flowers and a punchinello more enormous still. She gives the bouquet to mama and the clown to Trott, saying, "From M. Vézy."

Mama utters a cry of joy. She gets quite red and hides her face in the flowers. Trott is not pleased. He looks maliciously at the punchinello. Trott does not like M. Vézy. M. Vézy is very rich, he is handsome, he is quite young. He has always been very kind to Trott, taking him riding in the carriage with mama, bringing him candy and call-

ing him pet names, but Trott does not like him. He takes his little mama away from him too much. Often, when he comes back from his walk, he finds M. Vézy seated close to her, and then they hastily send him off to Jane.

Mama says, "What a splendid punchinello! How our friend M. Vézy does spoil you!" But Trott answers dryly, "I don't like that punchinello."

Mama protests at that, and praises the beautiful toy, but Trott only pouts and says, "He has an ugly twisted nose like M. Vézy's. I don't like him."

Mama laughs and makes fun of Trott. Trott is hurt and does not answer. In revenge he puts the punchinello with his ugly nose to the wall, and from time to time casts menacing looks at him.

But Trott's bad humor does not last long. Eleven o'clock strikes. As it is a holiday, Trott is going to church with mama. He puts on the coat with the velvet collar, his beautiful tan gloves, and the beret with the long silk ribbon. He holds mama's little prayer book and walks proudly at her side. At the church door a gentleman bows. It is M. Vézy. Mama thanks him for his gifts. Trott refuses to speak, so mama makes an excuse for him, and, to atone for Trott's impoliteness, asks M. Vézy to tea in the afternoon. Trott is indignant. It is the first time such a thing has happened. M. Vézy looks very happy. He strokes his beard and says things to mama in a low voice that make her smile and blush.

Now it is time to go into church. Trott sits down and listens with the utmost concentration to the singing, the liturgy, and the sermon. M. le Curé is telling about the birth of little Jesus between a donkey and a cow. He speaks of Jesus's unhappy death and he urges that everyone who celebrates Christmas should think of being kind to others, particularly to the poor and the humble.

Trott drinks in the curé's words and his soul is torn with new emotions. He feels a great tenderness toward little Jesus, and he would like to show this by doing what the curé had said. But that is not so easy. Trott is so little that he cannot give anything to anyone. Everyone gives things to *him*, and there's nothing left for him to give. How can he find someone humbler and poorer than himself, whom he can help?

On the way home, Trott meditates on this serious problem. Mama speaks to him. He does not hear her. She does not persist and walks along, preoccupied with her own thoughts, but Trott raises his head on hearing the voice of a little girl who is standing beside a gray donkey, saddled for riding. Trott has sometimes been allowed to ride him, but this is Christmas, so he will not be able to go today. The donkey starts to bray as if to say good-morning, and the little girl hits him on the nose to make him stop. This saddens Trott, but suddenly a light breaks upon him. Isn't this a needy soul that little Jesus himself has shown him? The poor donkey is the only creature he has met who is not

celebrating Christmas. He alone has nothing to make him happy. Now, little Jesus was born near a donkey and a cow. Trott does not know any cow, but he does know a donkey, this one here, who is like the one that saw little Jesus get born. And, after all, who knows if this may not be the very same donkey? Thérèse, the cook, said this donkey was very old. Trott shivers with joyous excitement. Perhaps he feels a little embarrassed at remembering that he has been on the back of a creature that may have been little Jesus's first playfellow.

During the entire luncheon, Trott ponders over his plan. After lunch mama goes to her room. She has letters to write and she must dress to be ready for M. Vézy. Trott slips out of the door and starts running towards the square, so as to find the donkey and give him some of the dessert that is left. The little girl consents to let Trott take the donkey and the two return together, Trott leading the animal with such respect that, in spite of his impatience, he does not dare to urge him forward when the donkey stops to drive a fly from his bare flank. Trott brings him to a halt before the dining-room window and says to him, "Wait here," then rushes into the dining-room. Alas! Louise has cleared the table during his absence. Trott could go and ask the cook for some bread, but he knows very well that charity should not "be known of men." He is disconsolate. He goes to the window and sees the donkey in the yard. The donkey lifts his nose and comes closer, with little joyous steps. He stops

in front of Trott and seems to look at him reproachfully. Oh dear! Has he built up false hopes? The donkey exhales his discomfiture in a sonorous bray. To Trott's ears, this bray sounds like a cry of despair and of sad reproach. Tears come to his eyes. Isn't there anything he can give to little Jesus's friend?

Suddenly Trott notices M. Vézy's flowers in a beautiful vase on the mantelpiece, and another inspiration comes to him. He knows that his duty is to please little Jesus by pleasing one of his friends. With the enthusiasm of an apostle, Trott seizes the bouquet, rushes out the door, leaps down the steps, and reaches the donkey. The donkey sniffs at the flowers for a second, then raises his lip and takes a bite. Trott, in ecstasy, watches him, his heart big with happiness. He does not hear the drawing-room window open, nor notice that mama, her attention caught by the braying of the donkey, has put her head out to see what is happening.

"Trott, what are you doing?"

Trott is brusquely torn from his ecstasy. He lifts his eyes. Mama's eyebrows are frowning, and her voice is severe. Trott stands motionless, suddenly uneasy.

"Come in this minute and bring me that bouquet."

Trott comes in and piteously offers a shapeless mass of decapitated stems. Mama cries out in dismay, "My poor flowers! Oh, Trott, how could you treat them so!"

Trott is much upset.

"You did it to take revenge on that kind M. Vézy and to make me feel badly. Bad boy! Naughty boy!"

Trott, in misery, stammers a few words. "I wanted to do something kind for the donkey. . . . M. le Curé said we should think of the humble. . . . I didn't know you liked M. Vézy so much. . . ."

Instead of calming mama, this last upsets her completely. "I *don't* like M. Vézy so much! I respect him and he deserves it. He is a friend." And she begins to scold Trott so hard, so hard that he chokes and the tears begin to flow. Still mama is not appeased. She sends him into a corner of the drawing-room, commanding him curtly to stay quiet and not get into any more mischief, "if that is possible."

This is too much. Trott hides his face in his hands and cries, "Mama, mama, you've never scolded me like this, even when I broke the pretty medallion that papa gave you before he went away." And he bursts into desperate sobs. He cries a long time. Little by little the tears cease, but a horrible skepticism has taken root. He does not believe any longer in either good or evil. Little Jesus has deceived him. The donkey has betrayed him. He must beg M. Vézy's pardon. He has offended his little mama and she has scolded him so terribly, oh, so terribly! A sob mounts to his throat.

"Trott," says a changed voice.

Trott dares not look around.

"My little boy," says the voice, still more sweetly.

Trott turns his head a little, ventures a glance, and sees

mama smiling at him. She does not look a bit angry any more.

"Come and kiss me, my precious boy," she says, and her lips tremble.

Trott throws himself into her arms. She puts him on her knee and covers him with kisses. Trott closes his eyes and gives himself up to the delicious moment. When he opens them again, he notices that mama looks very queer. Has he been hurting her again without knowing it? No, that can't be, for mama is laughing and picking up the remnants of M. Vézy's bouquet.

"Well," she says, "since it's spoiled, it's spoiled. Go take it to the donkey and let him finish it."

Trott hastens off happily.

"And then," she calls to him before he has reached the door, "when he has eaten it all, come back and get a note I have just written M. Vézy asking him not to come to tea today. I have a little headache. You can take it to him when you go back with the donkey."

That night, with his little mama at his bedside, Trott said his prayers as usual. And when he came to the part, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," something warm dropped on his forehead, but Trott did not feel it. He was already asleep.

Chapter 2

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM



MME. THILORIER and Mme. de Bray and mama are in the drawing-room. Trott is there too because he has a little cold and because mama had curled his hair to amuse herself and she wanted to show the ladies how funny he looked. Outdoors there is a big winter flurry. It seems as if the sun would never come back again. The wind growls and shouts like a man who is terribly angry, and against the window-panes beat gallons of water mixed with melted snow. It feels good to have on soft, warm clothes and to crouch shivering in the corner of the hearth where the fire glows and sparkles.

The ladies chatter as they take their tea and all the good things that go along with tea. Trott has had his glass of milk and a bread-and-butter sandwich. He knows very well that all those little cakes are not for him. He is too little. Such things are not for children. They are for big people. There are so many things that are very good for grown people and that are very bad for children. Why? Trott cannot understand. The other day mama was angry and said,

"Deuce take it!" Everyone laughed. Yesterday Trott said it just the way she had, and he got a good slap. That's the way things go. Grown people can talk as much as they like and it doesn't matter, but they make the children keep quiet. They were dreadfully sorry for Mme. de Bray when she tore her dress, but Trott was punished when he tore his trousers. The ladies turn around in church to see who comes in, but they glare at a child who does the very same thing. Why should things be like that? Trott really doesn't know, but he realizes it is something established, inevitable, a law one must bow to. It's queer.

The ladies chatter, nibble, drink; drink, nibble, chatter, all at the same time. Mme. Thilorier says, "Do you know whom I saw through the cab window as I was on my way here, splashing through the mud, with her umbrella almost inside out? Guess! Oh, you couldn't possibly! That poor Madeleine Saint-Clar!"

Mama and Mme. de Bray utter two sharp little mews. How in the world do they do it? Trott tries to imitate them. He succeeds, but a severe glance from mama stops his mew in the middle of his throat. He swallows it, nearly suffocating. He will try it again some other time.

"Of all things! That poor woman! What has become of her since her husband's failure?"

"It's a long story. You know they were completely ruined by the drop in nickel. To be sure, Saint-Clar paid his shortage, but Madeleine's money went completely. After that

they had nothing left. Literally nothing. So Saint-Clar went to the Transvaal to try to make his fortune, and Madeleine . . . She gives lessons, my dear, gives lessons in secret!"

"How horrible!"

"Yes, it's dreadful, I'd rather die, myself."

Trott would prefer giving lessons. It must be lots more fun to give lessons than to take them. He knows. He has an English Miss * who comes in for an hour every day. However, it must be still more fun to go driving and to balls like Mme. de Bray. Poor Mme. Saint-Clar!

"Her courage is very beautiful, to be sure, but don't you think she is wrong to show herself in places where she used to live? It must be very hard for her, and, so far as others are concerned, it is almost a lack of tact. Don't you think so, darling?"

Perhaps. But mama had met Mme. Saint-Clar only once or twice previously.

Mme. de Bray continues her tirade.

"Of all things, why come here where living is so high! A person should know how to plan according to his resources. Poor little woman! That's the way she always was, never any brains. And this lesson hasn't done her any good."

"Yes, my dear, you are absolutely right. What you say is so true! I have often said the same myself."

Mme. Thilorier nods her head, and then adds, "Poor woman! However, we must remember in her favor that she

* The usual French term for an English governess.

has a child who has a very delicate throat. The doctor told her last year that he must spend the next two winters at least in the Midi. That must be why she left Paris. But surely she might have chosen some other place along the coast!"

Trott is touched. This lady, then, has a little boy who is sick? And she has to give lessons so that he can come here? Trott does not understand this method of reaching the Midi. It would have been so much better to have simply bought tickets on the train. However, among grown people, things are like that. But the poor lady must be very unhappy.

"I assure you I was sorry for her, seeing her there in the middle of the puddles, huddled under a maid's umbrella and battling against the wind, in a cheap coat that must have come from La Belle Jardinière. You remember her yellow victoria, with those loves of ponies?"

"How charming they were! M. de Bray had some idea of buying them at the sale. Have you happened to run across the poor creature since the catastrophe? At least, I hope she won't show herself in society any more."

"Oh, so far as that is concerned, we must do her justice. She keeps absolutely to herself. I saw her one day at the Louvre, and she nodded at me so slightly that I could easily have pretended not to have seen her. But I shook hands and spoke a few words. She never allows anyone to visit her. She really is tactful."

Trott is astonished. Why mustn't she pay calls, this poor lady who runs through the rain like that and who has so

little money? She must need hot tea and cakes more than other people. Trott would have given her some right away if he had any. Why don't they want her to come and get it? This must be something else that concerns grown-ups.

"I had thought of asking her to come to see me occasionally, but my husband forbade me."

Mme. de Bray throws herself back with a sharp little cry. She shows all her teeth as if she wanted to bite.

"But he was absolutely right! Look at the figure she would cut at your 'at home' in her Belle Jardinière coat, sprinkling all the water in Christendom on our dresses and on your carpet! Imagine the Duchesse de Boiloy seated next to her children's teacher! You are mad, my dear, mad as a March hare! I know people who would never set foot in your house again if you did such a thing."

So that's the explanation! You couldn't let this lady, all wet and badly dressed, sit on the beautiful sofa, next to the silk dresses of the other ladies. She would spoil them all. It's just the same with Trott. Poor lady! Trott would like to hug her. He needn't worry about getting his clothes spoiled. She wouldn't dirty them. Little children are not like big people. They can be nice to unhappy folks. He would give something to the little sick boy, one of his playthings; not a broken one, but one of the very nicest. The little boy would like that.

Mama is a little flushed and her eyes are lowered as she stammers:

"Then you would criticize me if I asked her to bring her little boy here sometimes?"

Mme. de Bray raises her arms to heaven and lets fall an avalanche of words and little cries. Trott sighs. She is even more important a lady than mama. Trott had hoped for an instant that . . . but she must be right.

Mme. de Bray rises in a flurry. "No, my dearest, believe me, you must give up this absurd idea. For her as well as for you, such friendliness is not desirable. Let us do charity, but not mix classes. We must avoid promiscuity."

Promiscuity! What a beautiful word! Trott must remember it. Proximi . . . proximi . . . Trott suddenly feels himself lifted up in the air. Mme. de Bray has him in her arms.

"Such a fine little fellow! You tell mama, darling, that she must not receive that Mme. Saint-Clar."

Trott answers solemnly, "No, madame, she must not."

Mme. de Bray puts him down and begins to clap her hands, laughing as hard as she can. Mme. Thilorier laughs too. Then she asks Trott:

"And why, Master Trott?"

Trott does not want to answer. He lowers his eyes, but Mme. Thilorier insists. Then Trott murmurs in a tiny voice:

"Because she is poor."

Then he adds, lifting his head:

"But *I* can go and hug her, can't I, mama?"

Chapter 3

M. VÉZY'S CHARITY



THINGS have been very interesting today. Mme. Ray came to see mama to ask her to take a walk in the Winter Garden. At first mama refused; then she said yes. Then Mme. Ray said with her little American accent, "Let us take Trott."

When mama said, "He'll be a nuisance," Mme. Ray answered, "No, indeed, he will follow us like a little spaniel."

Trott looked imploringly at his mother, repeating, "Mama, I'll follow you like a little spaniel."

Mme. Ray began to laugh, calling him a darling, and mama laughed too. So he was stuffed into his blue jacket and crowned with his cap with the big pompon.

And now they are off!

How proudly Trott walks, brandishing his beautiful cane with the bulldog's head! In the other hand he has a two-penny piece that Mme. Ray has given him to buy a

cake or some barley sugar. It is a perfectly new coin. You ought to get a very big cake for money as new as that, or else a very long stick of barley sugar. From time to time, Trott opens his fist so he can see the coin shine. He feels happy and very much alive. He says to himself softly that he is not a little spaniel, but a very strong man who must watch over the ladies and protect them in case anything should happen. The ladies do not know this, but he, Trott, knows it and is very proud.

Oh, what a shame! Here's M. Vézy coming out of a shop. He is putting a beautiful gold link purse back into his pocket. He sees the ladies and smiles, showing his white teeth. Then he hastens towards them, lifting his hat and bowing so low you can see the shiny top of his black hair. It smells like the barber shop. Trott is displeased. He casts a malevolent eye over the gray perfection of M. Vézy's suit, the glittering white of his collar partly covered by the black beard, the flower in his buttonhole, the plaid tie, the immaculate shoes, the cane with a silver handle swinging in his left hand, and the two large, shining rings. Mme. Ray gives mama a queer look as if she wanted to laugh. Mama doesn't look especially pleased, and she has turned a little red.

Aren't they going to say good-bye pretty soon? No, they stand still talking about all sorts of things. M. Vézy is very animated and smiles lavishly while he scratches the ground with the end of his cane. When he throws out his

chest he looks like the fat pigeons that waddle in front of the hotel and act as if they were making bows all the time. Finally the ladies walk on, but M. Vézy, instead of continuing in the direction in which he had started, walks along with mama in lively conversation.

Mme. Ray, who has stayed in back with Trott, says suddenly in English, "Look, Trott!" And she sticks out her tongue and makes a horrible face at M. Vézy's back. Trott bursts into laughter. Mama and M. Vézy turn around. Mme. Ray calmly tells them a fib while Trott continues laughing to himself. It would be very ugly for a little boy to make a face like that, but it is very funny in a big person. Mme. Ray *is* funny.

They talk about a lot of things that do not interest Trott at all. Nevertheless he listens vaguely, having nothing else to do. Mme. Ray is asking M. Vézy the news of the bazaar that had been given for the benefit of the sick children at the hospital. Those poor little children! You see them sometimes when you pass close to the hospital garden. They are so pale and so thin and they cough all the time. If only the bazaar has made a lot of money for them!

M. Vézy shrugs his shoulders disdainfully. He does not approve of bazaars of this kind, which are more useful in amusing lazy rich people than in helping the poor. At least half the money made is eaten up in useless expense. It is a stupid habit, this making amusement out of charity. Amuse yourself as much as you like. That is all very well, but, in

working for the poor, you should take it seriously, giving yourself entirely to the task without thinking of yourself or your own pleasure.

Trott does not understand everything that M. Vézy has said, but what is clear to him is that bad people have spent the money that was meant for the sick children. How very wicked! M. Vézy talks on in a musical voice, gesticulating. Trott thinks he is like a picture in his history book of King David dancing before the ark.

Mme. Ray says in her sharp little voice, "You are wonderful, monsieur. Don't you know that St. Martin himself gave only half his cloak to the beggar?"

M. Vézy smiles. He is always smiling. He talks, he tells stories, he waxes dramatic. Finally he announces, "St. Martin was wrong. In the matter of charity, I repeat, one must give all or nothing. That is my motto."

Splendid! Trott doesn't like M. Vézy at all, but he cannot keep from admiring him. Thérèse was entirely wrong to say he was an ugly old stingy! Unless . . . M. Vézy had said you must give all or nothing. Who knows? Perhaps he meant he would give nothing.

A melancholy moan strikes Trott's ear. It is an old beggar crouched by the side of the walk. His clothes are all torn and dusty. An unkempt beard hangs under his chin; his scanty hair droops over his wrinkled cheeks; his fist grasps an extraordinary something distantly resembling a hat

that he holds out to passers-by. He is so dirty, so miserable, so pitiable, that you would rather not see him. Still you can't help being sorry for him.

Trott is most anxious. What is M. Vézy going to do?

M. Vézy apparently sees nothing. He continues to smile and to tell stories to the two ladies, without seeming to notice the beggar. He is going to pass by without seeing him!

No, he isn't. He is stopping. He plunges two fingers into his vest pocket, the very pocket where just a little while ago he had put the little gold purse. He rummages a second, throws something heavy into the old man's hat, while the latter bursts into benedictions, and then he walks on, never stopping his chatter, as if he had done nothing unusual.

All Trott's ideas are upset. M. Vézy's face seems to him to be encircled with a shining halo. All he had! He has given all he had to the poor man, quietly, as if he were not noticing what he was doing. And surely he had a lot of pennies and even gold pieces in the purse. . . . It's no use talking, there are not many people who would give all they had; certainly not many!

Trott's forehead becomes hot. He opens his right hand and stares at the two-penny piece. He hadn't even thought of giving it to the poor man, and yet he surely doesn't need either cake or barley sugar. He was only going to get some because he was greedy. And the poor man has never tasted

any. Sadness sweeps over Trott's little soul. He looks back. The poor man has disappeared. It is too late to turn back to him. Impossible! Trott is overwhelmed.

But entering the Winter Garden drives away his melancholy. M. Vézy points out the cake shop to mama and invites her and Mme. Ray to come and have tea. Mama refuses, but M. Vézy keeps on insisting most amiably.

What a good man he is! He is even better than St. Martin. He has not only given what he has, but he even wants to give what he hasn't. He has forgotten that he has no more money and he wants to offer tea to the ladies. Trott is so moved that the tears nearly come. He who . . . well, anyway he can make up for his unkind thoughts of this wonderful man. Two pennies! A little boy couldn't buy much with that, but perhaps a grown person . . .

At about the height of M. Vézy's stomach a piercing voice is heard, "M. Vézy!"

Surprised, M. Vézy looks down. He sees below him a blond head and a raised fist, holding up a two-penny piece.

"What do you want, my boy?"

"It is to pay for the tea, monsieur, because just now, you know, you gave all you had to the poor man."

Mme. Ray nearly splits with laughter. Mama bites her lips. M. Vézy begins to laugh too, but somehow he does not seem at all gay. He stammers a few words: fine little lad, a well-deserved lesson, taken literally; and he pats the astonished Trott two or three times on the shoulder.

They go into the cake shop. Everyone is seated around little tables. M. Vézy orders tea and lots of cake. A young lady in a white cap brings a trayful of good things. Who is going to pay for it all? Surely mama or Mme. Ray. But M. Vézy is not embarrassed. He seems to be inviting the whole world.

Yes, it *is* he who is going to pay, after all. See him put his hand into his vest-pocket! Now he pulls out the famous gold purse, from which roll a dozen gold pieces, and he takes one between his fingers . . .

Trott is overwhelmed with astonishment. His eyes pop out of his head. What in the world, then, had he meant when he said all that this afternoon? What did he give the poor man anyway? Perhaps two pennies! And yet he had said all or nothing. M. Vézy is nothing but a liar! Trott's face expresses disdain and anger.

M. Vézy offers his gold piece to the lady in the white cap. Trott springs up like a jack-in-the-box. "Madame, I want to pay for my own cake."

And Trott proudly gives his two pennies to the waitress. At least M. Vézy cannot say that he has treated *him*.

Chapter 4

THÉRÈSE'S STORY



MAMA has gone to the concert. Jane is at the English church. Louise has gone out. Trott is alone with old Thérèse.

Old Thérèse is sitting near the window of the dining-room. She is holding a big knife. On one side of her is a big basket of potatoes; on the other a salad-bowl. She takes the potatoes from the basket, peels them with the big knife, and then throws them into the salad-bowl, letting the peelings fall into her apron. Trott is sitting facing her on his little chair. He watches her gravely. It is interesting. She is very skillful. The knife runs quickly over the potato and takes off nothing but the skin. If Trott tried to do what Thérèse is doing, he would surely cut a couple of fingers.

Outside it is a very gloomy afternoon. It seems as if the poor sun were dead and gone forever. The rain keeps falling in tiny, cold drops. You can hardly see past the window-panes, so covered are they with mist. It is the kind of day when you don't feel like laughing or jumping around, and

you are just a tiny bit afraid of the night which is not very far off now, and which is slowly spreading its heavy black cloak. Thérèse is humming a sad song with a still more gloomy refrain. All this gives you a cold feeling inside, not quite, but a little bit, as if you wanted to cry.

"Thérèse, tell me a story."

Old Thérèse looks up from her potatoes, scratches herself behind the ear with the knife handle, and says, "Dear me, child, I don't know any stories."

But Trott answers firmly, "Oh, yes, Thérèse, you do know some stories. All big people know stories. And because you are a little bit old, you ought to know lots of them, oughtn't you?"

Thérèse is flattered at such confidence. She refuses, but less vigorously. She is embarrassed, but finally suggests, "If you like, M. Trott, I'll tell you my own story. It is the only one I know."

Of course Trott would like it. He is very much pleased. It will be a fine story, and besides it will be long, because Thérèse is so old. She must have had all sorts of adventures. Maybe she is Little Red Riding-Hood's grandma or Cinderella's fairy godmother. Trott pulls his chair closer. He rests his elbows on his knees, puts his chin in his hands, and listens with all his ears, while old Thérèse, continuing to peel her potatoes, begins to tell her story in a slow voice.

The story is very queer, not a bit as Trott had expected. It seems that a long time ago, old Thérèse was a pretty little

girl. She had pink and white dresses, a long braid down her back, two little brothers, a lovely mama, and a papa who was very strong. He didn't have gold on his jacket, like Trott's papa, but his uniform was green with shiny buttons. They all lived in a house with a red roof, in the middle of a garden. They were very happy and laughed all the time and loved each other dearly.

The two little brothers were the first to go away. It seems that they were so good that God wanted to have them near him. One night they coughed a great deal and then they became very red, and then, a few days afterwards, they were carried out of the house. God had called them. He put white wings on their backs and a circle of gold on their heads. Now they were little angels. Yes, old Thérèse is sister to two little angels. How funny it would be if she, too, had white wings and a golden circle!

After that, Thérèse's papa went away. He had been sick a long time. He had been so big and fat, and now he had become so thin you could see his bones through his skin. One morning he went away too, and never came back. Thérèse and her mama put on the black dresses they had had made when the little brothers went away, and they wore them a long, long time.

After that, little by little, Thérèse's mama got sick too. The doctors gave her heaps of expensive medicine, but it didn't do any good. She got sicker and sicker. Besides she was too anxious to see the two little brothers and their papa.

So finally she went away to join them, and Thérèse was left all alone. She had cried and cried. Then she was very poor. She had to leave her village and her little house and all the people she knew because she didn't have enough to eat. She took a place as nurse in a rich family. She brought up the two little children, but when they got big, she was sent away and never saw them again, even though she loved them dearly. She had been with other people, in other towns she did not know, and it was many years after, though she wasn't yet so very old, that she became cook to Trott's papa's mama. She stayed with her for a long time. It was only after this grandmother had gone away too, never to come back, that Trott's papa had asked her to come and stay at his house. She was there before Trott was born and she had often rocked him when he was a tiny baby.

"And now you will stay with us always, won't you, Thérèse?"

"As long as your mama wants me, M. Trott, or as long as God doesn't call me. Sometimes I think that will be quite soon. But I have finished my potatoes and I must go and get my lamp."

Old Thérèse gets up stiffly. She gathers the peelings in her apron, picks up the empty basket and the brimming salad-bowl, and shuffles off.

Trott sits by the window alone. Night has almost fallen. Outside there is just a little light, and the big pines in the garden stand up like black ghosts with long, thin arms.

Nothing is to be heard except the tap, tap, tap of the fine rain and from time to time the plaintive whine of the wind or the dull roar of a big wave as it breaks on the rocks.

Trott is left in solemn thought. Poor Thérèse! It is not surprising that she is cross so often. He will try not to annoy her any more. It must be very hard to see your little brothers go away and your papa and mama and everybody you love, and to go from place to place with people you don't know, like a dog you chase away. . . . Once Mme. de Bray had said it wasn't only getting old that gave you wrinkles, but also having trouble. Poor Thérèse! She is so wrinkled. . . .

And suddenly Trott feels all shivery inside. He shakes from head to foot in his little chair. A thought has come to him that never before has crossed his mind. Thérèse had been a pretty little girl with pink cheeks and long blond hair. Now she is an old woman with gray hair and knotted hands. Trott is a pink and white little boy. Will he too have wrinkles some day and gray hair and knotted hands?

Trott is frightened. He wants to be big, of course. It is splendid to be a man, to be strong, to ride horseback, to be a sailor, and do everything you like. But afterwards, do you *have* to get old like Thérèse? And besides, can it possibly be that you'd be . . . all alone! Can it really happen that some day papa and mama . . . ? And suddenly it seems to Trott, without his knowing why, that in the fast-falling night he can see something like a road dropping down through the dark, getting blacker and blacker as it drops.

Along the two sides are white crosses with angels flying around here and there. The road descends farther and farther, darker and darker, and it seems to Trott that he is sliding down it and that it is swallowing him up, little by little.

Thérèse comes back with the lamp. She sees tears pouring down Trott's cheeks. Hastily putting the lamp on the table, she takes him on her lap.

"Good heavens, darling, what is the matter?"

Trott's chest rises and falls with his sobs, but the lamp spreads light and gayety throughout the room. It feels good not to be alone any longer. By degrees the sobs lessen and the ugly thoughts disappear.

But that night before going to sleep, he murmurs into Jane's astonished ear:

"Jane, I'll *always* be a little boy, won't I?"

Chapter 5

THE POOR LITTLE BOY



TROTT is playing on the beach just behind the villa. It is a pretty little beach, very tiny, where almost no one comes. Trott is allowed to play there all alone although he is forbidden to go too near the water. Then, too, Jane is sitting in the garden and she keeps an eye on him without letting him know he is being watched.

Trott has his shovel with him. He has made a huge hole and an enormous mountain, almost as high, though not quite, as the big rocks out bathing in the water, or those sleeping near by on the sand.

"M. Trott, come quickly and get your luncheon!"

Trott climbs the slope and Jane gives him a piece of chocolate and a roll. He returns to his mountain. It is awkward to eat standing up, so the mountain changes to an arm-chair. Trott sits in it, his feet in the hole. He starts to nibble his chocolate, amusing himself by making designs on it with his teeth. How funny!

What is that? There is a shadow in front of him. He lifts his head. It is a little boy. He is very dirty and he has on ugly clothes. His face is all black and so are his hands. Under his nose are horrid red things. Trott lifts his shovel threateningly.

"Go away!"

The little boy puts his arm over his eyes and withdraws two or three steps. Then he sits down on the sand opposite Trott and looks at him.

Trott continues to nibble while returning the stare. Here is somebody who isn't annoyed every morning by being brushed and combed and soaped from head to foot. How lucky he is! But no; Trott is an aristocrat and a big boy. It is a nuisance to wash, but it is nice to be clean. How ugly this little boy is!

"You are awfully dirty, aren't you?"

The little boy lowers his eyes, then he lifts them and begins to grin stupidly, without answering. He pours sand from one hand to the other without stopping, but this does not seem to interest him greatly, for he keeps on staring at Trott who is finishing his roll. Trott looks at the little boy, follows his stare, and his eyes come to rest on the tip of the roll. He repeats this maneuver three times, then, sure he is not mistaken, he says:

"Rolls are good, aren't they!" and he sticks the last bit into his mouth.

The little boy utters a sort of melancholy groan.

"You have had your luncheon already?"

The little boy looks at him stupidly. Trott repeats his question:

"You have had your luncheon already, haven't you?"

The little boy shakes his head.

"Then you're going to have it right away?"

The little boy looks down. He fills his hand with sand and starts again to pour it from one hand to the other, shaking his head a second time.

"Aren't you going to have any today?"

The little boy does not answer, but Trott understands he has guessed correctly.

"Then you had indigestion yesterday?"

The little boy opens his eyes very wide. The word "indigestion" seems to open up unsuspected horizons. But he shakes his head again.

"Maybe you have a stomachache?"

Again a shake of the head.

"Or you have been naughty?"

The little boy again opens stupid eyes. It can't be that either.

"Then why haven't you had any luncheon?"

The little boy spits on the ground to Trott's great disgust, scratches his head with one hand and digs the major part of the other into his nose. He utters a series of unintelligible sounds.

"They didn't give you anything?"

The child nods his head affirmatively.

"Why didn't you ask your mama for some?"

"Did ask."

"And she didn't give you any?"

"Wasn't no more in the house."

To Trott this seems fantastic. What is the use of side-boards and cupboards? Every time you open the one in the hall or in the kitchen, you see heaps of good things. Nothing in the house? Impossible! The little boy is a story-teller. His mama must have told him he couldn't have anything to punish him. Trott says very severely:

"You have not been a good boy. What did you do?"

The child looks at him with round, stupid eyes. No answer. Trott gets impatient.

"Were you greedy? Were you rude? Did you make your Miss angry? Did you say your fable all wrong?"

No, always no.

"Did you disobey?"

The child murmured, "I do anything I want. Nobody says nothing."

Ridiculous! Trott begins to get angry, but pursues his point.

"Then why haven't you had any luncheon?"

"Nothing left in the house."

Then it *is* true. Trott is stunned. Can such a thing be! How is it that a mama can't give her little boy something to eat?

"Then you are hungry?"

There is no mistaking the expression of the little boy's eyes.

"If I had known, I would have given you a piece of my roll, because I wasn't hungry. But now it's all gone, you see."

The little boy nods resignedly. He understands.

Trott ponders for a moment. Finally he gets out a complicated question.

"But why isn't there anything to eat in your mama's sideboard?"

"Ain't no sideboard."

This is overwhelming.

"And in the cupboard?"

"Father don't earn much. Mother is sick with my new little brother, so there's nothing to stuff your belly."

Stuff your belly! For shame! What an ugly expression! Trott knows he should not talk with badly brought up children. He is about to depart, but curiosity holds him.

"Why doesn't your papa buy things to eat?"

"No money."

Yes, that is a reason. No, it isn't. Thérèse often buys without money. She signs in the book on mama's account.

"Can't he sign in the book?"

The child shakes his head. It seems that this can't be done. Again the sand is poured through the little fingers.

Trott is paralyzed by an astonishment that is akin to fear.

There really are children who aren't naughty and whose mamas have nothing to give them to eat? What is the use of God, then? Can it be possible?

Trott asks again, "Your papa asks God every day to give you your daily bread, doesn't he?"

The little boy does not seem to understand. Trott repeats his question.

"Don't think so."

Trott takes a deep breath. At last he has solved the mystery. How very wicked!

"What! Your papa doesn't say his prayers?"

"Don't think so."

"He never talks to God?"

"Don't think so. Perhaps, sometimes, when he is mad."

A strange time to pray.

"What does he say then?"

"Says 'God damn' and hollers very loud."

Trott meditates on this. It can't be a good prayer. Mama has never taught him to pray like that. Still when it comes to grown-ups . . .

"And you, what prayer do you say?"

The little boy begins to laugh sneeringly and does not answer.

"Tell me how you pray."

The little boy keeps on grinning as if he were making fun of Trott. Finally he says, "That's bunk, talking to God."

For an instant Trott is suffocated! God, good, kind God, bunk! Good, kind God whom mama has taught him to pray to every evening; who keeps his papa from harm way off there on the big ocean; who gives Trott his daily bread with lots of jelly and butter and cake and chocolate! Trott feels himself get red in the face, and loses patience. He seizes his shovel and bangs it down on the head of the skeptic, who receives the blow passively, merely protecting himself with his elbow while he looks furtively and amazedly at his aggressor.

"You are a bad boy and God has done just right not to give you anything to eat, if that is the way you thank Him."

"What shall I thank Him for?" complains the little boy.

This question embarrasses Trott. It is true that when you have been naughty or too terribly unhappy you do not like to pray to God. You are angry at all the world and feel like sulking. Trott had already taken two steps toward home, but he stops to think. Then he retraces his steps.

"Listen. If you don't pray, God can't hear you, of course. If you ask Him for something to eat, He will give it to you, but first you have to ask Him."

The little boy is puzzled. He is not sure that what Trott is saying is true, but after all nothing is lost by asking. Who knows what may happen? Only the other day he got two pennies by begging.

"Where does this God live?"

A hard question to answer. Trott gets a little mixed in his explanations. He is everywhere, everywhere, especially in churches. You don't see Him, but you need only ask Him for something and He will give it to you.

Trott becomes explicit. "This evening, before you go to bed, you must pray to Him to send you a big roll for breakfast tomorrow morning and you will get it."

"Where'll it be?"

"Why, on the table, of course, next to the chocolate. No chocolate? Then on the mantelpiece."

"My father will grab it. It'd be better if God brought it to me here in the hole under the rock. I'll come here and look for it."

Nothing is more simple. The hole under the rock isn't God's dwelling-place, but He can easily do this for the little boy. It is all settled now. There is nothing else to do except to explain very carefully to God just where the hole is. All fixed. But the little boy seems worried. What else is there for Trott to explain?

"Don't know how to say that to God. I don't know Him."

Trott sighs with impatience. How stupid this youngster is! Well, he'd have to show him.

He kneels down. "Do what I do."

The little boy tries to imitate. He falls over on his face. Trott puts him into position. Finally he is ready.

"Put your hands together."

After several ineffectual attempts his hands are joined. But how dirty they are! God certainly won't be much pleased with such hands, but then . . .

"Repeat after me, 'Dear, kind God, I'm very hungry.' Well, say it."

The little boy lets out a series of grunts. By listening carefully one can distinguish "God" and "hungry." He wriggles like a worm.

"Sit still! Now say, 'I'm very hungry. Tomorrow please put a big roll in the hole under the rock where Trott has left his shovel. Amen.'"

Trott gets up satisfied. This is the way to pray. He goes off with a protective nod to his disciple.

All evening Trott is absorbed in his thoughts. How happy that little boy will be tomorrow! Trott is all thrilled to think of it! But a scruple comes to mind.

"Mama, when you ask God for something, He always gives it, doesn't He?"

"Certainly, darling, if it is something reasonable and if you ask with all your heart."

Trott is reassured. It is certainly reasonable to ask for a roll for breakfast, and as for asking with all your heart, Trott remembers the little boy's eyes as he watched that roll disappear.

Trott goes to sleep. He dreams of wagon-loads of rolls, and God has emptied them all in front of the little boy. Each roll is as big as an elephant's tusk. The little boy eats

them, eats as much as he possibly can, and God keeps on bringing him more. The boy laughs, satisfied at last. His cheeks are red and fat. Trott is delighted and proud.

"Good morning, M. Trott! I hope you have slept well."

Jane brushes and combs Trott and helps him dress. All the while he is getting dressed Trott thinks of nothing but the little boy. He will have to pray God to let him get washed and to give him some other clothes. Trott would like to see his face when he finds the roll. What a beautiful day! That is so the roll won't get wet.

Trott swallows his chocolate in two minutes. He stuffs his roll into his pocket so as to get through more quickly.

"Mama, may I go to the beach for a little while?"

"What a hurry you are in this morning, darling. But go along. It is so beautiful outdoors. We'll call you when Miss comes."

Trott rushes off. He runs to the rock. What is God's roll going to look like? It ought to be browner and bigger than the baker's. A tiny feeling of envy enters Trott's heart. . . .

He puts his hand into the hole. He looks in. Then he becomes quite pale. There is nothing there. It can't be true! . . . Perhaps God let it fall in some corner near by. Trott looks carefully around. Nothing, nothing anywhere. What can it mean? In a few minutes the little boy will come and when he doesn't find anything he will say it is really

bunk about God. He will think that Trott tells stories, and he will be so hungry! Oh dear, oh dear! Trott's throat swells and chokes him. Of course God must have been too busy today, or He has forgotten, or the rolls got burned. That happened once at home. It would have been better, though, to have left one, even if it were burned. What is going to happen? Trott is terrified. He feels his legs quaking as in the distance he sees the little boy running quickly toward the rock, his face happy and his lips all shaped for eating. Trott feels frozen through and through. He would like to run away. Mechanically he thrusts his hands into his pockets. Oh joy! With a quick movement he plunges the forgotten roll into the depths of the hole.

The little boy is seated on the ground. He is stuffing himself so that he almost chokes. Trott, standing by, regards him somewhat wistfully. He is realizing that his own little stomach is not as well filled as usual. It is not without a certain bitterness that he watches the disappearance of the roll which should have been his own breakfast. At the same time he rejoices to think how happy God must be because His negligence has been rectified.

The little boy is finished.

"Was the roll good?"

"You bet, but it wasn't God who brought it. I saw you stick it into the hole."

Trott shrinks to nothing. It is true; no possibility of deny-

ing it. But all of a sudden his face lights up, and he answers triumphantly:

“Yes, but I think that it was God who told me to put it there.”

And off he runs, fasting, but with faith restored.

Chapter 6

THE SNAIL



MAMA is away for all day. She went off this morning with a lot of gentlemen and ladies in a big carriage. It was a pretty sight. Of course, Trott had to stay at home. He is too little to go. Miss had been asked to come to spend the day with him, so he would not be lonesome. Trott would have preferred to have stayed alone with Jane, but no one asked his opinion.

Miss is sitting on a bench at the end of the garden, reading an English book. Her glasses rise up high on her imposing nose. Not a muscle of her face moves. She turns the pages with automatic regularity. Trott has tried playing all sorts of games, but nothing seems just right. Finally he goes to his own little corner of the garden to look it over. It is in pretty bad shape. There is a mixture of stones, peelings, thin grass, and bits of wood scattered about, all of which does not make the spot exactly engaging. But all the same it

is quite lovely, thanks to the rosebush that grows in the middle. Trott did not plant this bush. It is a fine large one. Sometimes there are roses on it. There is one today, full blown. Trott looks at it from all sides with pride and delight. What a beauty it is!

All of a sudden Trott's eyes widen and become fixed. He stands mouth open, and gets very red. What is that! Crawling on the rose is a snail, an ugly snail which leaves a slimy trail behind it. It turns its head from right to left, draws in its horns, sticks them out again in a leisurely fashion, utterly at ease.

Trott examines it a second, then shrieks, "Oh, Miss, come, see!"

Miss lifts her big nose from her book. She puts the book under her arm and in four strides she is close to Trott. "What is it?"

Trott points with his finger, disgustedly. He has a horror of such creatures.

Miss lowers her eyes and focuses them on the snail.

"It is a snail, edible variety."

Trott looks doubtful.

"This mollusk is harmful to vegetables. You may kill it," says Miss in her stiff way.

Trott is grateful for the permission, but he feels a real repugnance at touching the creature.

"Miss, wouldn't *you* like to take it?"

Miss looks at him sternly.

"Why should I take it and not you? It is on your property. You are the one to defend your own property."

Trott sighs. He knows that when Miss has spoken, protest is useless. He stretches out his hand, then withdraws it. Finally he puts one finger on the shell. Good! The snail is afraid and has withdrawn completely inside its house. Trott breathes more freely. He certainly does not like these creatures, not a single bit. What shall he do with it? He will toss it over the wall into Mme. Ducrieux's garden. Trott is raising his arm to throw when Miss stops him in the act. She says austere-ly:

"It is not right to profit through harming others. This mollusk would eat your neighbor's plants. It is unfair to throw it there."

"Then what shall I do with it?"

"Crush it under your heel," says Miss.

Trott contemplates the snail in perplexity. Crush it under foot? Ugh! Merely the thought of hearing the shell crunch, to say nothing of the feeling of the squashy body of the creature under his sole makes him sick at his stomach. The snail can be killed some other way; throw it into the well, say. Yes, that would be better.

Trott prepares to put his idea into execution. Still he is not satisfied. After all the poor snail has done nothing wrong. Isn't it wicked to kill it like that? It was walking along, minding its own business, and perhaps it was quite

gay taking its little walk and having its dinner on the beautiful rosebush in the sunshine. But it was spoiling the rosebush. It was eating it. It ought to be punished. Still, why should it be punished? It has to eat, as much as anybody. It eats what it can. It isn't spoiling the rose because it is naughty, but because it is hungry, because it needs something to eat. Should it really be killed for that?

After all, don't they kill cattle and sheep and the poor little lambs that bleat so piteously, and the pretty birds in the forest that sing such lovely songs? They are more interesting than a snail, and not a bit more wicked. Yet they are killed. All right then! . . . Trott raises his arm to throw the snail . . . then he slowly lowers it, still tightly clutching the shell in his fist.

Yes, it is true that people kill animals, but they do so in order to eat them, because they need them for food. Otherwise it would be very wicked to kill them. Trott remembers one time when his papa boxed the ears of a naughty boy who had killed a bird by throwing stones at it. How angry papa was; yet birds eat the fruit on the trees and sheep eat the grass and the pretty flowers. The other day Trott saw a cow eat at least fifty daisies at one mouthful. Nevertheless it would have been very wrong to have killed her, and this snail is no more at fault than she.

With all these problems on his mind, Trott begins to feel very uncomfortable. He wants to cry. It seems to him

that he would be committing a great sin in sacrificing the snail to his own anger. And yet he simply cannot let his flowers be spoiled by this horrid creature. What shall he do? He racks his brains.

Arguments wander vaguely through his head. It is wrong to kill a sheep. But if you eat it it is not wrong. It is wrong to kill a snail, but . . .

Horried, he stares at the creature in his fist. He couldn't. He couldn't! From the end of the garden Miss looks mockingly at him. She has put her book on her lap and her tight sneering lips uncover what looks like the débris of an old game of dominoes. She is laughing at Trott's perplexity. How will it all end? . . .

All at once Miss starts up as if she had been pricked with a pin. She utters a piercing shriek and rushes forward, letting the precious book fall to the ground.

What has happened? Quickly, unexpectedly, Trott has rammed the snail way down his throat and, closing his eyes, has swallowed it!

"Oh, Trott, for shame! How could you! Unsanitary! Naughty boy, horrible!"

Wild, horrified syllables, mixed French and English, issue from her lips.

Trott calmly ignores the storm. He is more preoccupied with what is happening in his own interior. He is a bit anxious about his stomach. It is rumbling queerly. Probably the snail is taking a walk. The idea makes him feel sick for

a second. No, it is all right now. The snail must be digested. Trott returns to his garden. He looks at the rose-bush with redoubled tenderness and feels proud to have been able to protect its beauty without having sacrificed uselessly the life of its humble despoiler.

Chapter 7

THE VISIT



MME. DE TRÉAN lives over yonder in the red chalet with the two little towers. It is perched quite by itself on a cliff which juts into the sea, and it seems to say to the people who pass, "Go right on; don't pay any attention to me!"

Mme. de Tréan must be very old, though Thérèse says that she is not so old as all that. But her hair is completely white, her cheeks are wrinkled, and her jeweled hands tremble when she takes yours. Her back is bent; she can take only a few steps each day in the sunny garden, or else a little ride in her black carriage with its black horses and black coachman. All the rest of the day she sits quietly in her sitting-room, alone, or with a most tiresome young lady who reads to her. She doesn't care to see anybody and no one comes to see her. But once she had a son who was a friend of Trott's papa. He died, this son, far away, drowned in a terrible sea. Before papa left on his long cruise she had asked him to bring Trott and his mother

to see her, and now she sometimes invites them to lunch with her.

It is not very gay at her house. There is not a sound in the house. The old servants glide through the halls so noiselessly that you are almost afraid. There is not a dog nor a cat nor a bird. You hear only the deep voice of the sea complaining, scolding, or murmuring at the foot of the cliff, the sea that swallowed up Mme. de Tréan's son. Trott is awed when he goes to see her and talks low, just as he does in church. The house is filled with dark, austere furniture, hangings with heavy folds, and thick carpets. Heavy curtains veil the windows so that the sun never enters. Why should Mme. de Tréan love the sun? Her eyes wept so long that they melted and now she cannot see at all. She is blind. Her eyelids are almost always lowered, but when she lifts them you can see something vague, troubling, profound, which frightens you; and then, without knowing why, Trott thinks of the great shipwreck in which Mme. de Tréan's son was drowned, far away 'on the other side of the round world.

Trott has returned from his walk with Miss. Mama is in the sitting-room in a pretty pink dressing-gown with a lot of lace. She is talking with Mme. Thilorier. How in the world can mama talk so fast! Trott tries to do the same, but he never can; he only succeeds in spitting. Now mama, she never spits at all.

"Oh, my dear! I am heartbroken, absolutely heart-

broken! It would be so delightful. . . . But today I simply can't. I have promised. . . . I'm going to lunch with Mme. de Tréan. . . . Yes, really, the old lady on the cliff. It is a charity, you understand; my poor Pierre begged me to. Oh, no! He's not on his return trip yet. It's dreadful, this separation! . . . The best I can do will be to rush to you as soon as we get up from the table. Expect me at half past two. Now be nice about it. I'd so love to be there from the beginning. I must kiss you. Good! I'm going to call you by your first name. And you must kiss them all for me, all—even your husband and that fat Thilanges. Oh, I'm dreadful to say such things! What, Trott, are you still here? Run along quickly. Tell Jane to dress you for lunch at Mme. de Tréan's. You'll never be ready in time."

Trott obediently puts himself into Jane's hands. He is full of admiration for his mama. Mme. Thilorier had tried hard to talk too, but she did not succeed. She gave two or three little clucks; she opened her mouth like a cock who wants to crow, but each time mama cut her off. Trott is immensely proud of his mama. Mme. Thilorier is a big talker too. Thérèse says she is like a dozen magpies. Well, mama made her keep still. There aren't many mamas like that.

"Go into the garden, M. Trott, and wait for your mother there. She'll be coming soon."

Trott finds a chair in the garden, for he knows it will be a long wait. Mama is never ready. That's natural, of course,

because she is grown up, but the annoying part is that he will have to walk very quickly so as not to be late, and then he will be hot when he arrives, and that is not at all pleasant. Well, what does he care! When he is big he will leave earlier or else his legs will be longer. . . .

Poor Mme. de Tréan! She frightens Trott a little. She seems like one of those fairies he has heard about in stories. Her villa is like one of the castles where the fairies used to hide. But though she is old, she must be a very good fairy. Her lunches are always exquisite, and she says such nice things to Trott in a very soft voice; and then he can't help feeling flattered to be invited just as though he were a man. Trott is never taken to Mme. Thilorier's. This afternoon he can tell Marie de Milly and the others that he has been to town to lunch. How surprised they will be!

Ah! There is mama! She's running down the steps while she puts on her gloves.

"Hurry, hurry, Trott dear, we are late!"

Trott gives a melancholy sigh. It is just as he had foreseen. Luckily Mme. de Tréan's house is not very far, for he has to run all the way.

Mama rings. The heavy door shivers and turns on its hinges. The old servant appears. Mama gives him a friendly little greeting which he receives unsmilingly. He leads the visitors into the drawing-room. Mme. de Tréan is sitting in an armchair all alone; her hands are crossed, her eyes lowered. Mama flies to her, explaining that she is late.

Why does she do that? Mme. de Tréan knows that already. Trott offers her his cheek, then sits down in a low chair while mama and Mme. de Tréan talk. . . .

"Lunch is ready. Come, my little cavalier, give me your arm."

Trott runs up, very proud and excited at this great responsibility. The old lady walks haltingly toward the dining-room, his little hand in her trembling one. Trott is lifted on to a huge chair with a very high back, and his napkin is fastened under his chin.

He doesn't open his mouth, first because children should not speak at table, and secondly because he is giving all his thoughts to behaving properly. He knows that, if he put his elbow on the table or spilled his glass of water, Mme. de Tréan could not see him. But that would make it even worse; that would be like a lie. And Trott tries so hard that the perspiration stands out on his forehead and he can lend only a distracted ear to the conversation.

Mama does most of the talking. She is never tired! Mme. de Tréan listens, puts in a word from time to time, and a little smile comes to the corners of her mouth. Mama seems to be enraptured at her success.

"Is it long since you have had news of Pierre, my child?"

"Three whole weeks! If you knew, my dear madame, how this separation wears on me! Always alone! Of course I have friends who would be glad to distract me, but it is so difficult! The casino is impossible, just a few little dinners,

a visit, a soirée or two . . . and then restlessness, solitude."

Mme. de Tréan makes a little face. "Luckily you have Trott to keep you company."

"Poor little dear! Yes, indeed, he is my great stand-by. If I listened to my own desires, I should spend all my time with him. But one owes something to one's friends. One must resist sad thoughts. And, besides, he is almost a man already. I am no longer enough for him."

The man is struggling with a morsel of fish which refuses to stay on his fork. He is crimson. Hurrah! The fish is conquered. But there is a drop of gravy on the cloth! What a catastrophe! But no one has seen it. . . .

"And where was the soirée given?"

"At Mme. de Bray's, an intimate friend of mine. I have known her for six months. I stayed there only a moment. It was charming, a cotillion with everyone as wildflowers. And the supper was served at little tables. I was with Éva Thilorier, Veler, and that fat Thilanges. They were so gay. . . ."

Mme. de Tréan does not seem to be in a very good humor. Mama continues talking, but little by little her voice drops, her words come less quickly. The moment has come.

"Madame."

Mme. de Tréan starts. "What is it, my little friend?"

"I made a spot with the fish gravy. I am very sorry."

Mama cuts Trott short with a gesture of irritation. Mme. de Tréan wears a radiant smile.

"It is a good thing, little Trott, to confess our faults to those who have not seen them. We must always act so that anyone may know what we are doing, and if, by chance, our actions are not entirely irreproachable, at least we need not pretend. That's right, isn't it, my child?" she says, turning to mama.

Quite so, that is exactly what mama has always demanded of Trott. He is still very little, but he has certainly formed good habits. Mme. de Tréan is very clever and kind to have noticed it.

Mme. de Tréan gives a little sigh. Mama has begun to tell her about a ride the other day with a crowd of gentlemen and ladies. She laughs, imitates the gestures of M. Thilorier and the sharp voice of Mme. Ray, but Mme. de Tréan does not look pleased at all. Her face, never very joyful, has become most severe. Little by little, just as happened before, mama's voice fades into silence.

"Would you like to do me a favor, my child? Come driving with me this afternoon, you and Trott. I am not very gay company, I know . . ."

Mama is heartbroken. (She was heartbroken this morning too when she was talking with Mme. Thilorier. How many heartbreaks in one day!) If she could have known about it, she would have arranged. But she had faithfully promised to be at Éva Thilorier's at half past two. It was about the parts for a comedy. Oh, she was going to take a

little unimportant part, but she had to be there just the same. She was so sorry. . . .

Mme. de Tréan only said, "There are engagements which one must keep. If this is one of those . . ."

Lunch is over. They are back in the drawing-room. Mme. de Tréan seems distracted and mama less lively. She keeps watching the clock. Fifteen minutes gone already! Poor mama! At last she rises with many little excuses.

"Good-bye, my child. I shall not ask you to leave Trott with me. The drive might be good for him, but for a child of his age . . ."

Mama seizes upon the idea enthusiastically.

"Oh, Trott would be delighted, madame, and it would be so good for him! Wouldn't you like to go in the carriage with Mme. de Tréan, Trott?"

Trott isn't so sure. He was going to play on the beach with Marie de Milly, which would have been much more fun. He opens his mouth to say so. But poor Mme. de Tréan must be so bored with no one but that stupid Mlle. Millet! It wouldn't be nice of him, and then there is the black horse.

"Yes, mama, I'd like to go."

Mme. de Tréan realizes that his voice is not very enthusiastic and tries to protest, but mama will not listen. She insists that Trott is delighted and so is she. She kisses them both, and makes her escape.

Trott sits in the carriage beside the old lady. Now he is really enraptured. It is jolly to drive and, besides, he likes Mme. de Tréan, and, besides, it would have been mean to go away and leave her.

Mme. de Tréan asks, "Are you very sorry you stayed with me, little man?"

"Oh, no, madame! At first I was sorry because I wanted to go play with Marie de Milly, but now I am glad."

Mme. de Tréan smiles, then falls silent. The folds in her forehead seem deeper. Perhaps she is thinking of something sad. Trott has noticed it since lunch. She didn't seem at all amused when mama was telling her about her parties. Who knows? Perhaps it makes her sad to hear about all those lovely things that she can't see, the ladies' pretty dresses, the fine carriages with four horses, the flowers, the suppers, all those things that mama loves so. How beautiful it is now too, all the things you can see from the carriage on both sides of the road! Here the thick woods with the ever-green pines and the hazy blue mountains behind, and over there the sea, swaying slowly back and forth. Your heart feels warm and happy to see all this in the clear rays of the sun smiling up there in the sky.

And Mme. de Tréan can't see it at all, none of it. It must be horrible to be always in the night, always, always, always. Trott doesn't like the night. Then there is nothing but blackness all around except perhaps when something dreadful moves vaguely and makes you afraid. Who knows,

perhaps, if in that darkness Mme. de Tréan doesn't see the great waves which took her son away in the wreck?

"What are you thinking about, my little Trott?"

Trott feels his face flush, but luckily she can't see it. He does not answer at once.

"The view over the sea is lovely, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, madame. I mean . . . oh, well, it's pretty enough."

How selfish he is. It is all so brilliant, so gay and bright that he was going to tell her. He was forgetting that she couldn't see it at all and that it would make her even sadder.

"Only pretty enough, Trott? You must be hard to please."

Trott is embarrassed, because it is very beautiful and he must not lie. What can he say?

"It is not so beautiful as paradise, is it, madame?"

Mme. de Tréan smiles and run her hand over the little boy's head. Trott is happy. It is as though a little light had shone on her grave face. She will see paradise pretty soon, perhaps, since she is so old, and so it makes her happy to talk about it.

But while waiting here, it may not be paradise, but it's awfully pretty just the same. It's really lovely, all those things you can see. You want to laugh, to dance, to jump and frisk.

Trott can hardly hold himself down. He just can't. He'll say something foolish. That rock down there looks like

a big man bending down. He must ask if it's really . . . but she can't see it . . . and over there, that little house among the pines! Can it be the house of the ogre or of Tom Thumb? Trott itches to talk, to ask questions. It is as though all these beautiful things were going in through his eyes and pressing a little spring under his tongue, there at the bottom of his throat, a little spring which simply has to jump, to chatter, to say all sorts of things, to ask questions which might give pain, without meaning to, of course, but pain just the same. It is horrible! What can he do to stop it?

Oh! What a good idea! That way the beautiful things can't get in to tease his tongue! He will be like Mme. de Tréan and there will be no danger of his hurting her with his talk. It is true! Now he doesn't feel gay any more. Poor Mme. de Tréan! Now they must be passing near the red rocks . . . by peeking just a little. . . . Shame on you! That's not fair!

"We are at Silève, aren't we, Jean?"

The coachman answers, "Yes, madame."

"Trott, do you see those big, red rocks? They say that they look like mushrooms. Do you see them?"

"No, madame, I don't see them."

"How's that? Have they flown away?"

"I don't know, madame."

Mme. de Tréan is thoroughly astonished.

"But how does it happen that you can't see them?"

Trott does not know what to say.

"Aren't they worth looking at? Aren't they pretty?"

"Oh, yes, madame! It was very pretty, but it was too pretty, you see, madame, because . . . Then I thought it would be better . . . because . . . so that . . ."

Mme. de Tréan does not yet completely understand. Trott's voice is strained as though he were making an effort and as if he wanted to cry. Mme. de Tréan wants to pat his cheek to dispel his mood. Her fingers meet two clenched fists which are crushed against two tightly closed eyes. She controls an exclamation. She understands.

Very tenderly and gently she removes the two little fists and says to Trott in a voice which trembles more than usual:

"But, dearest, you must tell me everything you see. Then it will be as though I were seeing it for myself."

Really? Oh, splendid! Trott has pressed against his eyes so hard that at first he sees only red spots dancing, but that soon passes. He looks, he stammers, he talks. The carriage turns. He chatters on incessantly. And it is true, Mme. de Tréan's face no longer looks so sad. You couldn't exactly say it was joyful, but she listens to Trott with an air of special interest, holding him gently against her with her left arm.

They are in front of mama's house. So soon! What a shame! Trott gives Mme. de Tréan a big kiss and gets out. Why was she so sad while mama was telling her all those

stories? Trott does not understand. Well, anyway, she is happy now.

The black coachman takes Mme. de Tréan over the road to her house. But perhaps now in her dead eyes, it is not the unforgettable face of her lost son which shows its pale features. It is a rosy smiling face which she has never seen with her real eyes but which she has surmised with more penetrating eyes, with eyes which see clearly to the depth of his soul. And surely she will recognize him at once in paradise, that beautiful paradise which is even more beautiful than the Silève drive—Trott has told her so.

Chapter 8

TROTT HAS BEEN SICK



THERE is a very soft sun shining up there in the bluest sky. It steals through the linen of the parasol to give a friendly kiss to Trott's head. It isn't so strong but that you can look straight at it and Trott does look at it, happy all over to renew its acquaintance after his illness. It is a long, long time since he has seen it like this, the lovely, gay sun, without being separated from it by a roof or a pane of glass. How many days? Oh! Trott doesn't know; perhaps a hundred or a thousand or thirty-seven. The last number means infinity to Trott. He had to stay so many days in bed.

Trott begins to think back, vaguely; now it seems very sweet, although it gives him a little feeling of fright nevertheless. It is as though there were, in his life, a sort of deep black hole. If he looks hard he can begin to distinguish some things, as if the black were not all black, as though there were phantoms moving in it. One phantom resembles his darling mama, only it is too pale, too sad and thin; it

cannot be she. Another resembles a Jane who has red eyes and a tipsy cap. Still another looks like the fat doctor behind his spectacles. All this is far, far away and as vague as the things they talk about which happened last year.

It was after that that he fell into the black hole. What it was like or what happened there he can't remember. When he tries to think of it, still more confusion goes buzzing through his head, like smoke blowing past, heavy masses of smoke with horrible figures full of terror which he doesn't like to think of. Ah! But after that there are pleasanter things to remember. Little by little, he isn't sure how, the horrid black seems to melt, to become clearer very gradually, like ink spots when Jane washes them. And one morning, one pretty morning not very long ago, an exquisite little morning, joyous, fresh and pink, Trott woke up light and gay with his head free and clear. Instead of horrible specters swarming in a black smoke, fearfully hot or icy cold, or clouds which swept you away or whirlpools which buffeted you, Trott saw his own mama sleeping on a couch next to his bed and Jane arranging bottles near the window.

Then he tried to talk, but he didn't remember exactly how to do it. He gave a little grunt and mama woke up with a start. He wanted to say good morning, but what he did say was, "Mama, I'm hungry."

Mama burst into tears (what a funny thing to do!) so violent that she couldn't stop them. Trott hadn't known what it was that was so sad . . . but anyway they brought

him a little cup of bouillon. My, wasn't it good, only there wasn't enough. And how strong he felt after he had drunk it. He thought he must get up right away and start running. But they wouldn't let him, and a few days later, when they let him put his foot on the ground for the first time, the whole room started to turn around him like a merry-go-round, and, if it hadn't been for mama and Jane, he would have fallen full length on the floor. Then slowly, leaning on someone, he managed to stand up, then to put one foot before the other, finally to walk as far as a chaise-longue ready for him by the window. Oh, how good it was to breathe the pure, vigorous perfumed air of the sea!

And today for the first time they have fixed a big parasol and an armchair on the little beach which runs up to the garden. Between mama and Jane, both excited and watchful, Trott has advanced slowly with very little steps. Oh! of course, if he had wanted to, he could have come more quickly. He is strong now. But it's nicer to be careful the first time. It's pretty far, anyway. There are some fifty steps to take and that is a lot when you haven't taken any for so many days. Trott was very glad to reach the chair. After he sat down, he saw a sort of fog in front of him and he became so pale that mama and Jane were badly frightened. But he knew very well that he wasn't going to be really sick and that, as soon as it had passed, he would be quite well again.

And that was true. Now he feels perfectly well. Jane has

brought him a big glass of milk which he will drink pretty soon. She has gone into the house, but mama is sitting at a little table close by. She does not talk so as not to tire Trott, but writes a letter to his papa to tell him that his little boy is better now and that he is not yet going to a land which is further away than those papa visits, to a land you never come back from. Poor papa! He will be very happy to learn that his little boy is well again. The news he has been receiving must have given him a great deal of worry in that faraway country where he is. Poor papa! Trott wishes he had this letter now.

This great blue sea that lies so close to you is the same water on which papa is sailing. I wonder, if you threw a package into it, if it wouldn't carry it to him? Who knows? But perhaps the mail would be surer. Today the sea seems to be in a very good humor; heaps of little babbling waves come gamboling to stretch themselves on the beach. They push each other and play like little children. They sing joyful little airs and frolic and frisk about with astonishing quickness. They are fringed with white collars like Trott himself. One after the other, they hurry to reach the strand, rest there a second, and then return. The whole ocean is gay, happy and smiling. It is as though all the thousands of madcap little waves were hurrying to see who could first reach Trott and whisper in his ear, "Good morning, dear little Trott! How fine that you are well again!" The

sea is very nice today and Trott says, "Thank you," with all his heart.

The sky is with him also. It has spread its big blue coat with the sun as a beautiful shining decoration. A few tiny white patches can barely be seen here and there. You can tell at once that they are just little jokes of clouds, darling little clouds which have come only to warm themselves a moment and then to float away on the wings of a wind to say to other clouds everywhere, "Do you know the good news? Trott is well."

When Trott fell sick it was still almost winter. The flowers and leaves had hardly dared show themselves. Most of them were still hidden, cowering in the warm trunks of the trees, fearful of the frosts or the snow or the horrid north wind. But now they are braver. Growling old winter has run away, chased by the warm sun, his somber overcoat all torn. He is gone, no one knows where. And quickly, quickly, like little mice who stick their noses out of the hole the minute the cat is out of the way, quickly, quickly, the little buds and blades of grass, all the little shoots in the garden, the tamarind blossoms and the wee Easter daisies and the little yellow flowers which grow almost to the beach, all these have begun to sprout, to push, to grow, to swarm, as though each one wanted to be the first to hurry and say to Trott, "Well, dear little Trott, here we are, and we wish you the best of health."

What a pity that he can't yet walk and run! Poor legs! They are still pretty thin. Those calves need a little time to fill out, perhaps one more day, or two, or a few more. For the present it is good just to be sitting here in the fresh air and the sunshine. Trott knows that his legs wouldn't take him very far and he is satisfied with what he has. And anyway he doesn't need much exercise to work up an appetite, for suddenly he feels an enormous void. Oh, but he is hungry! And to think that he didn't even suspect it a few moments ago! Fortunately there is the glass of milk at hand and he can reach it without disturbing mama who is busy with her letter. Trott takes his glass in two hands, lifts it, and prepares to drink. Look! There is a fly in the middle of the milk!

Trott stops in disgust. Good for you, you glutton! You would drink Trott's milk, and now you're going to drown before you have time to steal.

How frightened the fly looks! Its legs move desperately; it tries to beat its wings but can't. With each movement it sinks further. Soon it will all be over.

Poor fly! After all, it is a very severe punishment. Trott holds out the spoon. "Climb up and fly away." But the fly has lost its head completely, and, instead of approaching the spoon, it swims away. Ah, well . . . so much the worse for it!

But no! All at once Trott is seized by a great pity. Wasn't he himself a little like this poor fly all those bad days when

he was struggling with the fever and pushing mama and Jane away from him? This glass of milk is a terrible sea for the fly, a sea which will engulf it just like that horrible blackness where Trott had drifted.

Trott pursues the fly with the spoon. Will he never be able to catch it? The leg movements grow feebler. . . . Oh, surely it isn't dying? To Trott it seems almost as though he himself were about to fall sick again.

At last the fly is captured in the spoon and Trott pours it out on the metal table along with a little milk. What if it is too late? The fly is tilted most pitifully on one side; its wings are glued to its body; its legs are motionless; it is just a little rag. It seems to be strangled, drowned, dead for good and all. Trott gently touches it with the spoon. He forgets to drink, watching it anxiously. There is no movement; it is dead.

No, it isn't! It is rubbing one leg against the other. The next minute it is wiping its face. There, you're nice and clean, Mr. Fly. It makes a great effort, frees a third one, and drags itself around on three legs. Now it goes quickly enough. The fourth is loosened and then the last two. The wings are the only things which aren't working yet. The fly rubs them and polishes them and shines them in vain, they refuse to unglue themselves. And yet it almost seems that that one . . . now then, courage! There we are! There is a significant zzzzz. The right wing is free; the left wing is still stuck, but not for long. The fly tries and tries.

. . . zzzz. . . Now both wings are in working order. The fly parades up and down in a business-like way. It comes, goes, stops, takes up its march again as though hurriedly searching for something lost, this way, that way, over there. Suddenly, puff, and it is gone.

It might have said thank you. Trott is a little hurt, but glad in spite of it. He grabs his glass of milk and drinks slowly in little greedy swallows to make the pleasure last longer; then, leaning back in his armchair, he looks dreamily through the parasol where he can see several flies promenading. Perhaps his fly is one of them. How quickly it took itself off! In a few days Trott will do the same thing and it will feel good, oh, yes, that . . . is . . . what . . .

Mama has finished her letter. Lifting her head she sees her little boy fast asleep, his lips half parted. He is still very white and thin and his features are drawn, but a tinge of pink has come back to his cheeks and the beautiful sunshine, the murmuring sea, the resplendent sky, and the new-born grass all whisper together to mama in a perfumed and smiling chorus:

“You will see, we’ll have our little Trott well again in a jiffy.”

Chapter 9

PAPA COMES HOME



ARE the hands of the clock sick today? They drag like cripples or the way Trott did the first days after his illness. Every five minutes Trott goes to look at them. It is truly disheartening. One hand, the longer one, goes a little faster than the other. A while ago it was straight up in the air and now it is beginning to lean ever so slightly to one side. It drops, but oh, with what precaution! It is taking no risks of falling to the ground in its haste. As for the short one, it is too discouraging for words; it is as fixed as a milestone. What on earth shall Trott do?

"Are you sure, Jane, that it isn't time to start for the station now? You know the train is nearly always ahead of time, and besides I think the clock has stopped."

But Jane, without even pulling out her silver watch or lifting her eyes from the sock she is darning, answers in a tone of infallibility:

"No, M. Trott, we have three quarters of an hour before starting."

Three quarters of an hour! Will that be soon or a long while? There are quarter hours which never end and others which fly so quickly that you can't tell where they have gone. When Trott plays with his little friends on the beach and Jane says, "We must leave in a quarter hour," that quarter hour is gone in less than no time at all. But when he has to study for fifteen minutes or when he comes in and Louise says, "A quarter of an hour yet before lunch," then those quarter hours are rascals which stretch themselves out till you think they will never end. How will these three quarters act? Trott has a melancholy foreboding that they will be the long kind because that's the way they always are when you're impatient.

Oh, dear! Trott yawns wide enough to dislocate his jaw. He looks disdainfully at his toys. How ugly and stupid they are today! At last he trails towards the kitchen.

"I hope you are going to make an extra good dinner for papa."

No luck! Thérèse is in the midst of scrubbing and shining her kitchen. At such times she is not responsive. She does not answer. Trott waits, hesitates, considers. Then he repeats his question in a none too positive voice.

The same silence. Trott begins to be uneasy. In general, when you question Thérèse and she doesn't answer, it ends badly. It ends by her talking too much. Shall he try once more? Hm!

"Thérèse."

Thérèse, on all fours, lifts her head. She gives Trott a look, but what a look!

That is enough for Trott. He beats a precipitate retreat, slamming the door behind him. With the door closed his courage returns and he calls valiantly through the key-hole:

"You're awful cross today, Thérèse," and scampers nimbly away.

Louise is polishing the dining-room. How everyone is working today! This doesn't often happen. Louise is a good girl, but she lacks conversation, and Trott looks on her as an inferior being. She is rubbing the furniture so violently that her face is crimson. She is going to all this trouble for papa because ordinarily she never seems to hurt herself working.

"Papa will be very glad to see the dining-room floor shine so much. I will tell him you are the one who polished it."

Louise's color becomes more brilliant. Her face looks like the big red bottle in the drug store when a light shines through it. But she does no more than give a little series of grunts which mean to be amiable but which you can't understand. That's generally what a conversation with Louise amounts to.

Jip, the black poodle, is asleep. When Trott tries to awaken him he only growls. He is a little sick and that makes him very cross just now. Better leave him alone. As for Puss, he is not to be found. He has to choose the very day when papa is coming back to go out. When he

comes back Trott will give him a lesson, because that's no way to act.

Through the windows Trott can see Bertrand raking the gravel on the walks. They are as smooth as the drawing-room carpet. Not a leaf, not a twig, not a weed, and that isn't ordinary either. No two ways about it, anyone could tell that papa was coming home.

Three days ago a little blue paper arrived; one of those papers, you know, that run along the telegraph wires so quickly that you can never see them pass. This paper said that Trott's papa was coming back to France right away, much sooner than they had expected. At first mama had turned very pale; then she had begun to laugh and dance like a crazy thing, squeezing Trott so tightly in her two arms that he almost lost his breath. What great luck! The next two days were like living in some lovely dream. Everything looked as usual and yet everything was changed. All at once, when you were thinking of nothing in particular, something began to tickle in your heart like a gay little bird that wanted to fly away. The sun was brighter, the sky bluer, and you wanted to laugh and yell from morning to night.

Yesterday morning mama left for Toulon. That's where papa's ship lands. Trott would have liked to go too, but mama was afraid that he might catch cold and get sick again. He is really entirely well, but they won't let him do everything he wants yet, and his legs are still not so round or so pink as before.

Trott is up on a chair looking in the glass. What if papa shouldn't know him? At first this idea disturbs him a little. Bah! no danger of that! A papa always knows his little boy. But will Trott himself know his papa? Oh! what foolishness! Of course he'll know him. Just now, perhaps, he can't tell exactly how he looks, but he's sure he will know him all the same and he will throw himself into his arms and say, "Hello, papa dear, I'm so glad you're back." Mama wants Trott to say "*vous*" * because that is more elegant, but papa permits Trott to say "*tu*" and he says "*tu*" to Trott. Trott likes that better.

At this very minute papa and mama are on the train. They are traveling very quickly, and each turn of the wheels is bringing them closer. What a lot they must have to say to each other! What about, I wonder? Probably papa is telling about his long voyage and is describing the black and yellow people he has met. And mama, she must be telling how often she has been to balls and dinners. Why, this very evening she is going to Mme. Thilorier's. That's too bad, but Trott will have time to kiss them anyway. What else will they talk about? About this and that and then, who knows, perhaps a little bit, perhaps also of . . . Trott begins to laugh all by himself. He lifts his eyes and in the glass he sees another Trott who wears a foolish grin. He laughs louder and the other Trott does the same. They understand each other. Perhaps papa and mama are talking

* *Vous* is the formal and *tu* the familiar expression for *you*.

about their little boy. What would they be saying about him?

"What are you doing there, M. Trott, up on that chair? I've been hunting for you for an hour. Hurry, we'll be late."

Trott is down with a bound. He is furious with Jane; he would like to slap her. An hour; perhaps that is more than three quarters of an hour. What if papa has already arrived! Mean old Jane!

It is a joke. They are in plenty of time. When Jane says it, an hour is less than three quarters of an hour.

Trott is ready in two minutes, and in the street with Jane. He suggests that they run to the station with all their might, but Jane indignantly refuses. The train is never ahead of time. They will have at least ten minutes to wait, perhaps even a quarter of an hour. Oh! These quarter hours! This one Trott knows in advance will be the longest and the ugliest of all the quarter hours in the world.

They enter the station. Jane talks at length with a clerk. At first he growls and seems to be in a bad humor, but in the end he softens. Jane and Trott cross the waiting-room and go out on the other side to the platform beside which the cars will soon be stopping. Oh! but the train is slow in coming! It hurts Trott to wait. It feels as though something inside him were loosened. It slides and rolls and jumps and runs through all his limbs, through his chest, everywhere; it jumps up into his throat and makes him want to burst into gales of laughter or into sobs, he doesn't know which.

A man wearing a cap is passing by.

"Is the train coming soon?"

"What train?"

"Papa's train."

The stupid man laughs. Trott would like to hit him.

"Where is your papa coming from?"

"From Toulon."

The man looks at the big clock. My goodness, if only he doesn't say a quarter of an hour!

"The train will be here in five minutes."

Five minutes! You don't think that is a long time? Well, you are mistaken. These wretched five minutes are never-ending. Trott walks up and down, looks at the clock defiantly, asks Jane a thousand absurd questions, and looks at the travelers who are waiting to go on the train.

Oh! There is the man with the white cap coming out of a glass door! A bell rings. Men in blue shirts begin to run, pushing little wagons which make a lot of noise.

"There it is, M. Trott," says Jane. "Look there. You'll see the train in a minute."

A great number of bells seem to ring in Trott's head, and a crowd of little wagons roll with a great clatter. He has climbed on a bench so as to see better. Now he is almost as tall as Jane. He stares so hard that his eyes almost hurt, but he doesn't see anything. And the time is over. What does it mean? Suddenly, there under the pines, a tiny little smoke rises. . . .

"Do you see the smoke of the engine?"

It is she. It is he. It is they. With all her strength Jane is holding Trott, who struggles like one possessed.

Just where the rails curve a huge locomotive comes into view, spitting and blowing. It grows and grows with an enormous growling. Bang! A noise like thunder rushes past the startled Trott. Isn't the train going to stop? Oh! At last!

Heads appears at the windows; old ladies, Englishmen with caps, a baby with its nurse, an officer. Where, oh where are they?

"Look, M. Trott, look over there."

Where? Trott has lost his head. He can't see a thing. He lets Jane drag him. She is running now. People hit him in the stomach with their valises. He just misses falling over a bundle of rugs. It is not until he is below the car that suddenly, lifting his eyes, he sees a gentleman with a brown beard and a blue cap leaning out of the compartment door and trying to open it, but who is very awkward because all the while his eyes are fastened on Trott's face.

Who is this gentleman? Trott's heart beats like a clock. There is a sort of mist before his eyes. A swarm of ancient things which were asleep in his head are rising about him like smoke. . . .

The gentleman jumps down from the car, grabs Trott, and lifts him up like a feather. A prickly beard scratches his face again and again. How good it is! A voice speaks to

him. He doesn't answer. He has forgotten the fine sentences he wanted to say. Other arms take him. Softer skin rubs his own. Mama is laughing and crying at the same time. At last they put him down. He is partly stifled and jostled by all these people coming and going. They pass in front of a clerk who asks for their tickets. They have crossed the station and, without knowing how, Trott finds himself on the way home between his papa and mama, holding a hand of each.

So it is really true. It isn't a dream. All the quarter hours are over and papa is here. It all seems unreal. Trott is abashed and talks only in monosyllables and hardly dares hazard a glance from time to time at papa's smiling face. But he drinks in all his words and squeezes his big hand very tightly. And when they reach the house Trott wonders how he has managed to get along without his dear papa.

Mama is busy unpacking the bags. Papa sits down in an armchair and takes Trott on his lap. Now Trott is brave again and looks squarely at the handsome browned face which is looking at him.

"Well, my little man, are you glad to see your papa? You won't put him out?"

"Oh! papa, you won't ever go away any more, will you?"

"Not for a long time, at any rate."

"And while you're here, you'll be with me a lot?"

"Every day, Master Trott, if you like."

Trott begins to laugh. It's too good to be true. He is sure it can't be possible. Big people can't be with little children all the time like that. Even today papa and mama have to go to dinner at Mme. Thilorier's.

"What's this you are saying about Mme. Thilorier?"

Then papa isn't going? How splendid! Then Trott won't be alone any more when mama goes to her balls and dinners?

Papa begins to laugh.

"I hope that mama will keep us company."

Trott looks at him doubtfully. He is none too sure. Mama loves to go out. But such a papa as this can do extraordinary things. Who knows?

Now mama comes in. All the baggage is arranged.

"What do you think, mama. Papa is going to stay with me for dinner this evening so you can stay late at Mme. Thilorier's without keeping Louise up."

Mama turns red and begins to laugh. Trott is a little idiot. Such a little idiot! He shouldn't have believed such a thing!

Perhaps papa shouldn't either. He doesn't look quite so happy as before. His eyes travel from Trott to mama with a funny expression, as though a shadow had come over his face, although the sun is still high.

Chapter 10

TROTT'S MISSION



TROTT is sitting on the sand at the beach. His shovel lies on one side, his pail on the other. Mechanically he scratches the sand with his two hands, looking straight in front of him at nothing in particular. He does not see the little waves come pattering on the sand like soft-footed kittens. He looks into the blue, open-mouthed, his gaze lost in the distance. Trott is serious. Trott is disturbed. Trott is unhappy.

Since when? For several days now, since the day of papa's return, to be exact. Yes, it is extraordinary and hard to believe, but it's so. They had been so happy to have him come back, this papa of his. During the three days of waiting, they had been too impatient to keep still, mama and he. And now that he *is* here and everyone ought to be altogether happy, Trott is sad instead.

Why? He doesn't know exactly himself. It is hard to explain. To begin with, it certainly isn't papa's fault. Papa is always right. You have only to look into his big brown

eyes, whose gaze is so straight and so deep, to be sure that he sees everything and that he does everything better than anyone else. And then, he's papa. But one thing is sure and that is that he isn't the same as he was before he went away. He used to laugh and joke and be full of fun. Trott was very small when he sailed away but he remembers that sometimes papa used to play such pranks and say such funny things that mama would have to say to him, "Pierre, do be serious a minute." Now papa doesn't romp any more, nor say funny things. His heavy black eyebrows seem almost to have grown blacker and heavier, and his eyes are so bright that you hardly dare look at them. Some people are really afraid of him. Since papa is here, we don't see anything more of Mme. de Bray, Mme. Thilorier, nor of several other ladies; nor of M. Vézy either who used to come almost every day. And mama doesn't pay visits any more. She stays at home and never puts on the dresses with no sleeves to go to balls in the evenings.

She is changed too, his pretty little mama. Trott has never seen her like this. Why, she scarcely ever laughs or talks and never does that little dance with the kick and the song, "Tarara-boom." All that is over. When papa is there she says very little to him; she lowers her eyes, lets things drop, breaks them, gets everything mixed. Her movements have become brusque and awkward, like Jip when he is in disgrace. If papa asks her something, she answers very quickly as though the words were hurrying to come

out, and yet couldn't quite get through. If by chance she raises her eyes, they have the most curious expression like when you have swallowed some pepper or a drop of cognac or when you are going to cry pretty soon. Even when she is alone with Trott it isn't the way it used to be. She takes him gently on her knee and talks to him tenderly, stroking his hair slowly over and over. And when Trott looks at her he sees that her eyes are full of tears as though she had a great sorrow inside which hurt her very much and could not be contained.

Trott is overwhelmed by all this. What is happening? No one is dead because no one has put on black clothes. No one is sick because the doctor doesn't come. Trott has been good. The weather is fine. The lunches and dinners are always excellent. Then what can it be?

It is so horrible that it makes Trott ill to think about it. Oh, dear, he knows only too well what it is, but he wishes he didn't know. It is too awful. There is no doubt about it. Though it seems perfectly impossible, it is true, it is true!

Trott's papa is angry with his mama.

There! At first Trott wouldn't let himself believe it, but now he has to. Little by little the fact became undeniable. How can it be possible? Papa cannot be wrong. But then can it be that mama . . . ? Has Trott's mama been naughty? It is unheard of for a little boy to ask himself that question. The very thought makes Trott blush. No,

mama has not been naughty. That is impossible. Mama is far too good and too nice. And yet, it *is* mama.

Then why is papa angry?

Well, it is pretty hard to understand, but Trott has finally worked it out. Mama liked to go out riding, to put on pretty dresses to go to the balls, to play in the comedies, to listen to music, to laugh and joke with the gentlemen. None of that seems very terrible, does it? Well, when mama or Trott or anyone else talks of these things, why, papa's eyebrows almost come together, and his gaze becomes so heavy that you want to put your hands before your eyes so as not to be crushed; and when he talks, his voice is rough as though his words were put through the grater. Mama turns red, her hands tremble, and her eyes fill with tears. All of a sudden Trott remembers that Mme. de Tréan had looked displeased too when mama was telling her about her pastimes. There are curious things which Trott does not understand. Evidently big people like papa and Mme. de Tréan don't like you to have too good a time. Probably mama is not altogether a big person and she acted like the children who think they can do what they want without being scolded.

The other day, quite without meaning to, Trott heard some dreadful things. Before going into the dining-room, while he was washing his hands at the little basin, he suddenly heard papa's voice, a voice so changed that he hardly recognized it; like the cracking of a whip, and then like

the rumbling of thunder. He must have been very angry. And he said words which Trott did not understand: "crowds of hussies and coxcombs—deplorable behavior—anonymous letter—a cardboard husband—cruel surprise—more than light conduct—old blackguard of a Thilanges—pull his nose—that Vézy fellow"—etc., etc. That was all right for M. Vézy and M. de Thilanges. Trott doesn't like them at all. But those other things. Trott realized they were not for children's ears. He had been so frightened of that heavy voice that he had clapped his hands over his ears so as not to hear it. After a minute he had gone into the dining-room. Papa was walking up and down angrily. Before sitting down at the table mama had gone to the window to look out and had blown her nose hard, yet Trott knew she hadn't a cold. And no one was hungry for lunch.

And since then? Well, since then there is always something. Papa has not lost his temper again but he is not happy. He scarcely talks. He has wrinkles down the middle of his forehead. When he goes walking with Trott he does not tell him stories. And mama acts as though she were ill. You never hear her voice any more. She keeps looking at papa with big, sad eyes which make you want to cry. At table, they let Trott talk as much as he wants, but it's no fun to talk all by yourself. And at times there are long silences as if no one dared say anything and each one were thinking within himself such sad thoughts that he couldn't give them voice.

Trott is in the depth of despair. He would never have believed that a papa and a mama could be angry with each other. Every time he thinks of it, it hurts so badly, so badly, that he wants to cry for comfort. He glimpses the existence of a crowd of horrid things which he had never suspected before. But since this misfortune he sees them all as if through a sudden little crack. He tries not to look, he shuts his eyes, but, in spite of himself, the horrors approach and lift his eyelids. Oh! When will it finish so that Trott can think of other things, gay, happy things, and no longer see these nightmare figures crawling nearer? It may be that big people have to learn to know them, but surely they don't have to come hurting little children too. . . .

It has lasted many days now. Is it going to keep up forever? It is easy to see that mama isn't angry. She would like papa and everybody else to be happy. Well then, why doesn't she ask forgiveness and then it will all be over. The good God always forgives you and papa surely wouldn't be more severe than He. Oh, hurry, hurry! Trott doesn't feel like running any more, nor chattering, nor playing. When he is with mama and papa he can do nothing but study their faces to see if a little gleam of sunshine isn't ready to shine through; and when he is away from them, even when he is playing, he always sees papa's stern forehead with the hard lines down the middle of it and mama's poor mouth which looks so forlorn because it can't smile any more.

"Hurry, M. Trott, there's the dinner bell."

He has to go. That's too bad because it is nice on the beach. The sun is setting so prettily in a mass of little pink clouds, like soft feather pillows on which it is going to lay its head. After dinner it will all be gone, but now that dinners are such dismal affairs no one lingers over them and perhaps they can go out for a little afterward. For the present Trott will have to look at the somber faces of papa and mama . . . unless . . . by chance . . .

Ah, no! This dinner is going to be just like the others. As soon as he is seated, Trott steals a glance at mama, then at papa. That is enough. Papa seems to be thinking of something tremendously serious, and mama is staring into her plate. They talk about uninteresting things and yet they are glad to see Trott and ask him questions and listen to what he says. But Trott would have liked the old way better when they made him keep still sometimes and it was they who did the talking and laughing. Mama would love to. She tries to say a few pleasant things but they come out with great difficulty. Papa is always serious. His voice is not harsh but it is sad, slow, and very low, and that is almost worse because it seems as though it never again could be laughing and gay.

If it were anyone else who were so stern with his dear little mama, Trott would think he was a bad man, and mama would surely become very angry and would scold him. But she is not angry; she does not scold. Papa must have good reason to be angry; then that would mean that mama

. . . Oh! Trott is sick! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! papa and mama just *have* to make it up and be friends; otherwise he can never be happy any more. If papa should go away on another trip before it is all fixed, though, it would be horrible.

Dinner is almost over.

"Mama, it is so nice this evening, don't you want to go out again for a little while?"

Mama asks papa with her eyes. Papa says:

"All right, we can go to the beach and sit down on the sand. It will do us good to get a little air."

They put on Trott's little sweater. Papa takes his cap and mama wraps a big scarf around her shoulders.

They take a few turns on the beach, then papa and mama sit down on the sand with Trott crouching at their feet. How beautiful the young night is! It is not very dark yet, but the stars are already brightening the sky and the big moon, nearly round, is just rising. Its soft rays spread over everything like caresses and, when they strike the sea, it kindles into light. A silver river gleams on the black waters with here and there a glinting spangle. Over the land come the distant murmurs of sleepy things; the slow lisp of the sea whispers good-night, and in the skies the stars hurry out so as to keep watch over the drowsy world.

How can anyone be sad or unhappy in the midst of so much loveliness? Trott is forgetting all his troubles and his bad tempers. How that spear of moon dances on the water!

It is very beautiful and very joyful; not the kind of joy to make you laugh, but a very nice joy which makes your heart feel warm and soft. The spear seems to be gliding toward Trott, to hesitate, run away, come again, to be playing with him. It comes from up above, from the sky where God is. . . . How dark it is! It is really night now, time to go to sleep. They'll be calling Trott in a minute to take him off to bed. Why is that necessary? What earthly good? He would sleep so well here under the ceiling of stars! It is too exquisite a night to stuff yourself inside of four walls. The sand makes a soft bed. Trott stretches out, full length, his feet toward the sea and his head between papa and mama. And now sleep comes sailing over like a great black bird, and his thoughts flutter off like swallows into the sky. Soon there will be nothing. Mama hasn't come to hear Trott's prayers and neither has Jane. He'll have to say them by himself, but he is too sleepy, he can't remember the words. God will forgive him. Oh! But there is one thing he must ask because it is very important. Trott asks it in his mind, he tries to say it, but he can't; he is asleep. And yet God has to hear it, so he makes a huge effort. And suddenly a little voice comes knocking at the hearts of papa and mama, tearing them away from the somber thoughts which beset them.

"Oh, dear good God! I feel so badly because papa is angry with mama. Oh! You know how it hurts! Oh, I pray You, don't let them be angry any more so I won't be

frightened of those terrible things. And let me love papa and mama again with my whole whole heart, because You know, dear God, when they are angry I feel so badly and am so frightened and I'm only a little boy. Amen."

A wide, solemn peace falls from the shining sky. The sea murmurs the lulling refrain of its quiet song. The smile of the hushed earth answers the calm smile of the stars, and Trott's voice echoes like the small, secret, powerful voice which lies in the depths of every heart. Papa bends toward mama. He takes her hand in his. Little by little mama comes nearer and leans her head against his shoulder. She sobs very softly. A few words mount from their hearts to their lips, and forgiveness, confidence, and good will rise and spread enfolding wings like the silken flight of moths.

Trott is in bed. Through a half-opened eye he sees two faces bending over him, close to each other, cheek against cheek. He smiles vaguely and drops back into sleep. Tomorrow it will be good to wake up.

PART II

TROTT AND LUCETTE



Chapter 11

THE INTRODUCTION



TROTT has a little sister.

She has taken long enough about coming.

He heard about her first one evening, it is hard to say just when, but it was a long time ago, one of those evenings that warn you that winter is coming. Just when it was the very nicest, all warm and comfortable by the fire near the lighted lamp, mama took Trott on her lap. It was the hour when one feels very tender or thinks things that are a tiny bit scary, as the night falls and masses of shadow fill up the corners of the room. Mama cuddled Trott, kissed him many times, and said to him, "Trott, would you like to have a little brother?"

Trott was playing with his mother's chain. He thought a moment and then answered, "No, thanks. If you're getting one to please me, I would much rather you would buy me a live turtle. Because, you see, I would have to lend him

my toys and he would break them, and that would make me mad."

Mama started to laugh. She began to tell him how interesting it would be to have a little brother, to play with, to set a good example. Hm! That means he would have to be good for two. Trott sighs. It is hard enough to be good for one as it is; but for two! That is altogether impossible. Trott explains this to his mother but she only laughs harder than ever.

Papa comes into the room and mama tells him about Trott's fears. There! He is laughing too! It is very strange how grown people laugh sometimes at things that are tremendously serious.

Papa asks Trott, "Would you like a little sister better?"

Trott gravely examines all phases of the problem. A little sister? Perhaps that would be more fun. Marie de Milly is a very nice girl. Yesterday she brought him an almost whole barley-sugar candy. Yes, Trott likes little girls best. Besides they are not as strong as little boys, and so, if one quarrels . . . Papa and mama are talking together, completely absorbed, when, like a gimlet, Trott's shrill voice pierces their ear drums: "Well, papa, if it is all the same to you, I should like a little sister best."

"All right. Don't forget to ask God for one every night."

And Trott did ask for one every night. Every night? Well perhaps not exactly every. There are nights, you know, when one is so sleepy one does not really know what

one does say. So, perhaps on those nights . . . Of course, one said one's prayers, but inside rather than out loud. However, every night that he did not fall asleep too quickly, Trott asked God to send him a little sister. He explained carefully what she should be like. She must be very pretty and very good, not so big as Trott, and she must like meat very much and not care a bit for dessert. Then Trott would give her his meat and eat her dessert himself. Besides she must be called Polycarpe. Polycarpe! This name is very dear to Trott, no one can tell why. Mama got excited when she heard that beautiful name. The little sister's name was to be Lucette. Lucette! What an ugly name! Why, that was a dog's name. Polycarpe is much lovelier. Still, if she is much smaller than Trott and does not like dessert at all . . .

Anyway, Trott has rather forgotten, these last few days, that she was to come at all. So many things have been happening that this is quite excusable. Mama has been very tired, and even a little sick. Then she told Trott that he and Jane were going for a little visit with Mme. de Tréan. It is very kind of Mme. de Tréan to invite Trott, but he would have preferred to stay with his little mama from whom he had never been separated. She, too, squeezed him so hard as she was kissing him good-bye that one would have thought she didn't want to let him go. Still he had to go. Everything had to be prepared in advance for Mlle. Lucette (that hideous name), and Trott was not to come

back until she had arrived. She is a real princess, this young person. Her wet-nurse * is already there, a huge Alsatian who speaks almost no French, and who inspires in Trott a respect commensurate with her dimensions. The crib, too, is all ready. It is only she who is missing. It isn't polite of children to make big people wait.

Trott comes to see his mother every day. He kisses her hurriedly and then hastens to look in all the corners of the room to see if *she* is not hidden there, but nothing does he find, always nothing. After his visits, Trott returns to Mme. de Tréan's and thinks about other things.

Mme. de Tréan is very kind. Trott is very fond of her, although sometimes he is a bit afraid of her because of those eyes that do not see. Every evening he sits near her in front of the sparkling fire. Sometimes he looks at picture books while she knits. At other times she tells him stories, wonderful stories. She knows all the best ones.

One night Trott returns thoughtful. He is so plunged in meditation that Mme. de Tréan is astonished and questions him. What is the matter? Has he done something naughty, or perhaps he has a little stomachache? No, it is not that. Trott finds his voice.

"Madame, I want to know where babies come from. Jane says people find them in cabbages. I have seen a picture where a stork is holding one in his beak. And Bertrand, he's

* Wet-nurses (*nourrices*, familiarly called *nounous*) are very generally used throughout Europe.

our gardener, has told me that they buy them in the market like little ducks. But I know that isn't true. Tell me, madame, how do they come?"

Mme. de Tréan replies softly, "It is God who sends them during the night without making any noise and without anyone's seeing them pass by. An angel puts them in the cradle which has been prepared for them. And we must love them and care for them very tenderly because, since up to now they have been in heaven, they are very sad and homesick and cry a great deal."

Trott considers. How many little children there must be up in heaven waiting to be born! What a lot of noise they must make! Well, those little children must know God. They have just come from seeing him. That is queer. Perhaps the little sister . . . but Jane arrives to take Trott up to bed and interrupts his meditations.

This morning Jane is very gay while dressing Trott. She is so gay that one would hardly know her. "How queer you seem this morning, Jane."

Jane laughs and says, "Do you think so?"

"Jane, what is it? Tell me, oh, please tell me!"

"You have to guess."

"Someone has found my top! The black horse has run away! It has been raining sugar candy like in the story book about the land of Cockaigne!"

"No, M. Trott . . . well, something we were expecting . . . you know, in the crib."

"The little sister has come!"

She is here. If Trott is good, he will see her this afternoon. This news makes Trott actually drunk with excitement. At last she is here, the little sister who has been waited for so long! Perhaps he had better bring her a plaything. No, not the mechanical horse, for she might spoil that. The pink doll? She is very ugly. The big clown is too heavy. Oh, well, there are plenty of other toys at mama's.

The morning dragged by very slowly. It is over at last! Trott has had his lunch. He is dressed. He has started. He gambols like a goat the entire way. When he is happy, he needs to laugh with his legs in this way. And today they are laughing like mad, those legs of Trott's. They carry him to the left, to the right, first here, then there. How poky Jane is! She calls to him, telling him to go more slowly. Trott laughs at her, but he is wrong. He falls full length and skins his knee. Jane picks him up, scolds him, brushes him off and takes him by the hand. He calms down.

"Say, Jane, the little sister can't run as fast as I can, can she?"

"No, not quite as fast, M. Trott, you may be sure of that."

Not quite as fast? Now, that is exactly as it should be. In this way, when they play run and catch, Trott will be able to catch her whenever he wants. He, however, will not let himself be caught except when it suits him. It is wonderful. Only, she mustn't fuss. "Say, Jane, she will

have to be very good, won't she? If she isn't, I'll give her a little punch . . ."

"Try to be good yourself! What kind of a heart must you have to want to hit her already, poor cherub!"

Trott is much offended. That stupid Jane doesn't understand a thing! Naturally he isn't going to hit her right away; it will be later on, after a long, long time, tomorrow, perhaps.

"And try not to make any noise when you go in. Your mama is very tired, and perhaps baby is asleep."

How tiresome! Trott has such a heap of things to tell his mama. Yesterday he found a very beautiful pink shell. And besides, he has held the bridle of the black horse a long time. Then, too, he will have to tell her he has torn his trousers. Not the new ones, luckily. . . . But here is the garden gate already. Trott opens it softly. He is beginning to feel a certain vague disquiet. After all, he does not know her, this little person, and when Jane has pulled the bell, a strange desire seizes him to take to his heels. How silly! Thérèse, the old cook, is opening the door. She has recognized Trott's voice.

"Well, M. Trott, you are going to see her, that little sister of yours. But don't make any noise. Your mama wants to kiss you first of all. Go up very softly."

Trott clammers up the stairs. He is more and more disturbed. There is a heavy silence in the house that squeezes his throat. He has to wait in the hall. Jane will see if he

can go in to his mama. Trott waits a long time. He is very serious. It must be getting time for tea. But here is papa!

"Papa!"

"Sh—come in to your mama. She is sick. You must only say good-afternoon, and then you must go out."

This is no fun at all. Papa does not look so splendid as he does when he is all dressed up in his navy officer's uniform. Papa is all disorder. His eyes are red, and he is dressed every which way. What an upset just because of that little sister! Trott begins to feel displeased.

Mama's room is almost dark. It smells like a drug store. Mama is in bed, very pale, all white. She looks so tired. . . . Yet a little smile touches her lips when Trott approaches. All in a maze he bends over to kiss her, and murmurs mechanically, "You know, mama, I found a beautiful shell—" but papa interrupts and makes him stop talking and puts him out in the hall into Jane's hands. He finds himself back in daylight again, much bewildered. Now he must go to see the little sister. Oh, well, that will be more fun. One can jump and laugh a bit. But sh—little sister is asleep. The lazy little thing! Trott will soon wake her up. . . . But no! "If you make any noise, M. Trott, you will be sent out immediately."

Trott promises to be good. He tiptoes along the hall. Jane knocks at a door. The enormous Nounou appears. She smiles and discloses the huge teeth of a cannibal, which greatly impress Trott, and she says to him, "Papyzleebs."

Trott stops, dumbfounded. Is she swearing? What is she going to do? No, that's how Alsatians speak. That means that the "baby sleeps." Reassured, Trott slips in softly. He turns toward a large pink crib. Nounou pushes the curtains back, Trott bends over, and he sees—!!

He sees a sort of baked apple, all shriveled, very red, with here and there excrescences and holes. It really looks like a very tiny face that someone has sat on and that feels very hot. There are also microscopic hands like those of an old woman, all red and wrinkled. The thing looks old, miserable, dried up! Trott is in consternation.

"Briddypapy!" says the nurse.

Trott lifts his head hesitantly, then he turns his back on the baby who continues to sleep. So that's the little sister!

"Well, M. Trott, what do you think of your little sister?"

"Don't you think, Jane, if we send her back right away, that God would be willing to change her for another baby not quite so ugly?"

Jane becomes very indignant. She overwhelms Trott with reproaches, but he doesn't hear them. He is looking steadily at the little red doll. How ugly she is! Oh, well, Lucette is a pretty enough name for her. Polycarpe would have been much too beautiful. There, she is moving. This is more interesting. They can move then, these little scraps? And even—it looks as if—yes, truly, her eyelids open; two

things like round black beans appear, no white; there—her mouth puckers—you must be polite. Trott, a little alarmed, says very low, "Good morning, Lucette."

She does not answer. Yes, she does. She is making a face.

"Wa-a-a-a—"

Trott takes a step backward. What kind of conversation is this? He feels his head swim. What, can that voice belong to his little sister! You would think it was the voice of Marie de Milly's doll, which cries when you press its stomach; only this cry is much uglier and louder.

This doll squalls as hard as she can in the voice of a punchinello with a bad cold. Nounou picks her up; she rubs her up and down; she shakes her. Oh, dear kind God, why is she so ugly?

She waves her hands as if she wanted to pull out your eyes and nose. Four miserable hairs stray over a naked pate which wobbles to right and to left. And to think that no one is astonished; that everyone seems to find this quite natural! Is it possible that other babies are like this? To think that that little thing there has come from heaven!

Trott had forgotten this. He suddenly feels respectful. Yesterday she was with the angels and with God.

"We must go back, M. Trott. Say good-bye to your little sister."

Little sister is very quiet now. Her eyes are looking straight at the ceiling. Nounou is talking with Jane. Now is

the time! Trott approaches the little face. He kisses it, though it disgusts him a trifle, and he whispers into the tiny rumpled ear, "Is God well?"

No answer.

"Is it pretty in heaven?"

No answer.

"Is it true that God has a long white beard?"

No answer. Oh, yes, the mouth is puckering up! Trott beats a precipitate retreat.

"Wa-a-a-a—"

"There, you have made her cry already, M. Trott. Come, let us be off in a hurry."

Trott and Jane walk along side by side.

"Well, have you made friends with your little sister, the darling?"

Trott says, "I think she is too ugly for anything."

"Why, the idea!" exclaims Jane. "You were ever so much uglier, yes, you!"

Trott reddens. He is deeply hurt. He would like to answer that Jane was not present when he was born—there was another nurse—but his tongue gets tangled up. He keeps silent. It is more dignified.

They have returned to Mme. de Tréan's; Trott is seated at the corner of the fireplace beside the old lady. She asks him in her sweet voice, "Well, Trott, have you seen your little sister?"

Trott answers coldly, "Yes, madame."

Mme. de Tréan is blind but, in spite of that, she can see many things.

"Aren't you glad she has come?"

Trott responds gently, "Oh, yes, madame, I am glad."

"One wouldn't say so, my dear. Tell me what you are thinking about?"

Trott overflows. Little sister is ugly. She has queer eyes. She rubs her face. She is too red. And besides, she is not at all nice. Trott asked her about God and heaven and she wouldn't say a single thing. She only went, "Wa-a-a-a." It was horrid.

Mme. de Tréan smiles. She takes the little man on her lap. She talks. She explains. All little children are like that. . . . Is that so!

"And besides, you know, Trott, that very little children do not know how to talk. So they cannot tell about the angels and God. But they are very sad and cry because they remember the angels' kisses and all the beautiful things in heaven."

Now Trott understands everything. Surely it must be nicer to be rocked by an angel than by that big, ugly Nounou. And besides, not to be able to walk and talk! How terrible that must be! Trott shivers just from thinking about it. Kindly feelings creep back into his heart and he says to Mme. de Tréan, "I shall try to be very good to my little sister so that she will not be too sorry about leaving the angels."

Chapter 12

TRIBULATIONS



KNOCK, knock.

"Who is it?"

"May I come in and say good-morning to my little sister?"

Mme. Prudent, the one who has been taking care of mama since she has been ill, half opens the door.

"Come back pretty soon, dearie. Baby is going to take her bath now; go and see your mama while you're waiting."

Trott patiently plods to his mother's door.

Knock, knock.

Papa's voice asks, "Who is there?"

"It's me, papa. I want to say good-morning to you and mama."

"Pretty soon, little man. Your mama is busy. Run to the sitting-room and keep Mme. Ray company. She has come to ask for baby and she's waiting all alone."

Trott heaves a little sigh and starts off again. He is tired

of having to go knocking at all the doors and being unwelcome everywhere. Trott is not accustomed to so little attention. Luckily, Mme. Ray is very nice. A little mocking sometimes perhaps, but she frequently has chocolate drops or cakes. This helps you overlook many things. Trott opens the sitting-room door. Mme. Ray flutters across the room, light and quick as a bird, and before Trott can say a word, she asks him with her little American accent, "May I see the baby?"

She could at least have said good-morning to Trott, so he answers dryly:

"No, madame, Mme. Prudent doesn't want anyone to say good-morning to my little sister."

"Oh, how annoying these women can be! They're all the same. Then tell me all about her. Is she well?"

Trott replies with a little air of restrained dignity, "Mme. Prudent is very well."

Mme. Ray taps the floor with her toe. "No, no, little simpleton, it's the baby I'm talking about."

Trott grows more and more dignified. "She is very well, thank you, madame."

"Come, sit down next to me and tell me exactly how she looks."

So far, not even the shadow of a chocolate! Trott looks at the ceiling perplexedly. He must find some way, some delicate allusion.

"She is very funny. She doesn't like chocolate at all."

And at the same time he turns a meaning eye toward Mme. Ray's pocket. That wasn't a very polite thing to do, Trott knows very well, but he does want the chocolate so! Mme. Ray doesn't understand. There are times when big people are just too stupid. If Trott were as stupid as that when reading his lesson, Miss would give him a good scolding. Mme. Ray laughs her funny little gay laugh which sounds as though someone were shaking a bunch of little bells very quickly and says:

"How extraordinary! She will come to that later. But tell me, whom does she look like, your papa or your mama?"

Trott blushes with indignation. As if that hideous little thing could look like his mother, who is so beautiful with her blond hair, her eyes blue as the sky on a fine day, and her cheeks white and pink as though they were made of wax! Or like his sailor papa with his lovely brown beard and the gold braid on his cap! Trott answers, and his voice is disdainful:

"No, madame, she doesn't look like them at all. She looks like one of those red things, you know, that you see in the shops where they sell sausages."

Mme. Ray gives a little cry of horror. They do not seem to understand each other very well. Happily another voice interrupts:

"You may bring Mme. Ray to the baby's room."

This mission revives Trott's self-assurance. He could lead Mme. Ray anywhere he wanted because she doesn't know

the way. But he, though he is just a little boy, he knows the way. As they go, he explains that the baby isn't pretty yet, that Mme. Ray mustn't be angry if the baby doesn't say good-morning to her, and a thousand other things to prepare her. Here is the door. Trott hurries past Nounou who always frightens him a little and leads Mme. Ray to the crib. Suppose the baby *is* red; well, anyway it is at least uncommon to be as red as that. There is no one but Will, Mme. Gordon's English coachman, whose nose is redder. So Trott begins to boast:

"Look, madame, see how red she is."

And then he stands, mouth open, astonishment painted on his face. Why, baby isn't red at all! She is yellow, yellow as a little Chinese! It's extraordinary! He'll have to get acquainted with her all over! Trott had become accustomed to the little red bundle, and now she isn't that at all. He'll have to begin from the beginning again. Perhaps it is another baby. But no, she has the same little grimacing face, the same little hands, thin as a bird's claws, and the same "Wa-a-a" which sounds like a battle cry. Maybe she's painted? Hardly, or they'd have chosen a prettier color; blue, for example. Then she must have done it all alone. Is she going to change like that every day? Perhaps tomorrow she'll be green or purple? Trott is uneasy. The birth of this little sister is really a very complicated event. Every moment something new happens to upset him. Trott looks

around with a sort of anguish, fearful of seeing a crowd of goblins peering from behind each chair.

"She is hungry, poor little thing. Are you forgetting her, Nounou?"

They are going to feed her. What, I wonder, chocolate, chicken, or seed like canaries? Trott looks on with interest. Nounou is coming. But where is the pan, the plate, the spoon, and fork? Nounou is taking baby, and my, what funny motions! Trott is greatly troubled. He has a high regard for the proprieties. He feels the blood rushing to his face. No, no! It's too much! Trott can't stand it!

"Why, where is Trott?"

Trott is gone. He has gone out to the garden, and while waiting for them to take him back to Mme. de Tréan's he is walking and thinking in amazement of this remarkable little sister whom God has sent him, who cries all the time, who turns all the colors of the rainbow, and who has such an astonishing manner of taking her meals. Trott is in deep distress. A great, unknown world is opening before him; never has he felt himself so small as before this tiny creature. When one is afraid, one prays to the good God. Trott takes out his handkerchief and carefully wipes off one corner of the walk so as not to soil his new trousers. Then he kneels down and prays:

"Dear God, don't let my little sister change color like that and don't let her be so ugly nor cry so much, and then"—

no, no, it's too hard to explain to God about Nounou—"and I pray You, don't let me be afraid any more and make them love me hard, and then, please, don't let there be any more scary things. Amen."

His prayer finished, Trott gets up, wipes his knees, and, a little more reassured, answers Jane who is looking for him to take him back to Mme. de Tréan's.

Chapter 13

THE BUMP



It is not a bit nice to have a little sister, not the littlest bit! Trott has been back at home for several days now, and everything is wrong. Nothing is the way it used to be. The biggest nuisance of all is to have to go on tiptoe all the time. No running, no shouting, because little sister sleeps from morning till evening. Mama is not sick abed any more, but she is always stretched out on the sofa. You can't play with her, she is always so tired.

Before he went away, Trott had a pretty little bedroom all for himself next to mama's. Now they have expelled him, and put Lucette and her big, fat Nounou in there, while he is simply shoved into a room on the next floor, without even being asked if he wanted to go. As the new bedroom is smaller than the other, they had to leave nearly all his playthings in the closet of the old room, and, as luck will have it, every time he wants one of them, Lucette is asleep and he cannot go in to get it.

It is really a very serious state of affairs. Before Lucette came, Trott was an important personage. The whole household revolved about him. Every act of his, every gesture, was an event. Thérèse, the cook, would give him cookies secretly, and Bertrand, the gardener, would leave the raking to show him birds' nests. Now Thérèse thinks of nothing but making eyes at Lucette, and as soon as that big Nounou appears in the garden Bertrand is at her heels. No one pays any attention at all to Trott. And yet, surely he is much nicer than that little helpless bundle. Little sister is no longer either yellow or red, it is true, but she has the same rather worn-out looking face, the same meaningless arm-wavings, and the same queer grimaces. And when she's not sleeping or crying, she's nursing. She blows out her cheeks, collapses them, blows them out again and collapses them again. She doesn't think of anything else. She's a glutton. And besides, she is dirty. No, no further details. She is very dirty. Enough said. Whereas Trott, he knows how to talk and run; he can turn somersaults, recite verses, and *he* wears trousers that do not need to be changed every hour or so. Isn't that enough to make one cross?

But Trott is not merely cross. There is something else the matter. What can it be? No indeed, he is not jealous of his little sister. He loves her dearly in his own fashion, and he is very kind-hearted. He wants her to be happy and comfortable and he does not wish her the slightest harm. Of course Trott isn't jealous. He is merely sad; very, very

sad. Perhaps the reason that no one pays attention to him any more is because papa and mama have stopped loving him. Now they have a new child, they do not care about the old one. Trott can understand this, for he himself, as soon as he had been given a new box of leaden soldiers, forsook his old shabby ones. Apparently, it is the same thing with grown-ups. Yes, they have forgotten him entirely. Here is proof. The other evening mama and papa were discussing whether or not to give limewater to the baby. Dinner was announced. They got up and walked into the dining-room, leaving Trott unnoticed. Papa happened to turn around and saw him. "There, we were forgetting you; hurry up." Forgetting! Papa said that. They were forgetting Trott! Two or three tears fell into his soup. No one noticed. They were again deep in discussion over the limewater question.

Great sorrow entered Trott's heart. They did not love him any more. Well, perhaps a little bit, but not as they did before. And when one has been loved to the full, a little is not enough. Trott's heart is very heavy, and he feels somewhat as he did that time he ate too much apple tart.

And today things have gone worse than ever.

This morning he was doing his lessons with Miss, and he was a bit grouchy, so, though usually he is most polite, he said a word that is not very—well, you know. And papa, just coming in, heard him. Trott got no dessert, and they had whipped cream!

After lunch, Trott was in a hurry to stretch his legs. He

rushed out of the dining-room, slamming the door behind him. This waked little sister, who began to howl. Mama said, "That boy is unbearable!"

This evening, coming back from a walk, it was almost dark. That is the time, especially when one's heart is heavy, that one longs for petting. Trott wanted to go to his mother and sit beside her on his little footstool as he always had done, but there in his own place was Lucette in her bassinet, and mama was so absorbed in making faces at her that she hardly took time to give Trott the hastiest little kiss. Trott felt a cold wave go over him and he slipped over to the window and sat there all alone, watching the night descend over the garden.

Finally papa came in. He sat down next to the baby, said to Trott, "Pouting, my boy?" and began to chat with mama about that little doll who was holding on to his finger. Trott drew farther into his corner, and still blacker melancholy descended upon him. He was sure now, absolutely sure, that no one loved him any longer. Formerly, when he had been naughty, they scolded him a little and then it was all over. They gave him a big kiss, and, really, it was almost nice to have been scolded. Now they scolded him harder, and did not pet him at all. What should he do? And they used to love him so much, so very much. And when he was sick, it seemed as if they loved him even more. Suppose he got sick now . . . perhaps . . .

There's an idea. Baby has been carried out. No one is

looking. Papa and mama are talking together softly. With one jump Trott is standing on the seat of his chair. He grasps the back with both hands and gives a good push against the window-frame. The chair falls over with a terrific bang and Trott is thrown to the floor and sent rolling to the center of the room.

Mama utters a piercing cry; papa rushes to Trott, picks him up, and hurriedly looks at his forehead. But mama must have him; she takes possession of him, holds him on her lap, cuddles him, pets him, calls him her dear little awkward boy. Trott cries from joy and pain, for he has a big bump on his forehead.

"How did you come to fall, my poor darling?"

Trott cannot answer. He is crying too hard. Finally he manages, between sobs, "I—I did it on purpose."

Papa and mama look at each other in amazement. What can he mean?

Well, boys must never tell lies. Hard as it is, especially when there are so many tears rolling down, Trott explains. He wanted to find out whether his father and mother loved him any more, even the least bit. He knows very well, of course, that they cannot love him, the old child, the way they can little sister who is new, but he thought maybe they still loved him just a little. He wanted to know for sure. And now he is happy, very, very happy, although—and the cataract redoubles in violence.

Mama slips an arm around Trott's neck and wipes his

eyes. Papa holds the little hands in his own big ones. Both are smiling, but it is a very special kind of smile, a very tender smile. Music fills Trott's ears, music of soft voices and words, a music that fills his heart as well. And now he is hearing the most wonderful news. It seems that they love him just as much as before; as much, even, as Lucette. Only Lucette is very tiny. She cannot talk. She is not strong and so she has to be cared for all the time, whereas Trott is a big boy. Oh, but they love him just as much, indeed they do. Papa lifts his little boy up in his arms, plants a big kiss on each cheek and asks him, "Is everything all right now, my man?"

And Trott answers, with eyes still red, but mouth all smiles, "Oh yes, but just the same, I'm glad I gave myself that bump."

Chapter 14

A GOOD IDEA



IT is a beautiful day. As mama is still a little tired, papa has taken her out for a drive, and Trott and his little sister are in the garden with Jane and Nounou. Trott is playing on all fours in the gravel. The first part of the game is to pick out black pebbles and then light-colored ones. Next you shift them from one hand to the other by making them jump right up into the air. It is a very complicated game. One simply cannot explain it to grown-ups.

Little sister is being walked up and down in her nurse's arms. Every now and then Nounou lays her down in her buggy and rocks her gently to keep her quiet.

Papa and mama have hardly disappeared when old Thérèse comes along, holding a chicken which she is picking. She has a grater with her too, some crusts of bread, and a round tin can. She is going to prepare bread-crumbs for the dressing. Bertrand, who has been raking the lawn, now comes and stands around, rake in hand. He tells a story

that must be very funny. Everyone shrieks with laughter. They are all chattering. Trott feels uncomfortable. He does not like to hear people talk so loud. Mama doesn't, either. It is not polite. He would like to venture a remark himself, but he realizes it would be useless; they would only send him to take a walk, so he keeps still.

He slips close to the buggy where his little sister is sleeping. How does she manage to sleep with all this noise? Oh, well, all the better; at least she isn't crying. As soon as she wakes up, she cries. Trott is very sorry for her. Is something always hurting? They rub her stomach, they pat her back, they shake her, they let her nurse, they rock her, they walk her up and down. Often she will not stop. Who knows, perhaps they have been mistaken. Perhaps nothing does hurt her. Perhaps she is unhappy. That might well happen. Trott remembers suddenly what Mme. de Tréan has told him, that little children are very sad when they come down to earth because they cannot see God and the angels any longer.

There is no one in the house, certainly, who looks in the least like an angel. Papa is very handsome, but then that is different. Mama is rather more like one, but she has no wings. And as for all that chattering crowd over there, they aren't worth mentioning. Jane's nose and chin are too pointed, and she has a tiny mustache; Nounou is a perfect elephant; Thérèse is much too old; Bertrand is dirty and smelly. That's all the people there are. Yes, there is Trott himself, but he is no angel as he very well knows. Only yes-

terday his mother had told him he was a regular little imp. Still Mme. Ray had exclaimed not long ago that he had the face of a cherub. And a cherub is a small angel. Positively. This idea makes Trott sober and intensely thoughtful.

Suddenly Thérèse feels her skirt pulled. She turns.

"What do you want, my pet?"

"I want you to give me the chicken feathers, Thérèse, the big, long ones."

Thérèse makes up a generous bundle and puts them into Trott's hands. Too bad there are no white ones, but no matter.

"I would like to have some string, too."

Luckily, Bertrand happens to have some in his pocket. Perfect! Trott sits down on the ground and starts to work. It is extremely difficult, but with patience he can manage it.

Meanwhile Bertrand is telling the ladies that very shortly the carriages which are returning from the festival of Saint-Didier will be passing. Such gowns as there will be, and such a good view from the gate! Jane's voice rouses Trott from his work.

"M. Trott, you stay here a moment with your little sister. If she cries, call us. We will be at the end of the garden."

Very well. Jane takes off her apron quickly so that the passersby will not think she is a nursemaid, but a governess, and they all start for the garden gate. Bertrand is being very nice to Nounou, who positively wriggles with pleasure.

Trott remains sitting on the ground, completely ab-

sorbed. There, one is finished. And now the other. They are not exactly alike, but we must not be too particular. When a person does the best he can, that is all that should be asked. Next thing is to fasten them to one's back, and this is no small operation. Trott nearly unhinges his neck trying to get a glimpse of his shoulder-blades. It is dreadful, and to think that a little bird can do it so easily! At least, thanks to the string, it ought to hold. What a nuisance not to know how it looks! Anyway, they are something like the real thing. The worst is over. Now there must be a white gown. Jane's apron is just the thing. Trott ties it carefully around his neck. He must hurry. There is that child beginning to stir. Quick, quick, a crown! The can will do for that. It doesn't stick very tight, still it doesn't wobble too much. There must be a harp, too. Trott grabs the grater, and the knife that Bertrand left lying on the ground, to scrape it with. Marvelous!

"Wa-a-a-a—"

"Oh, no, no, little sister, don't cry. Wait a minute!—There!" She doesn't see him. All his work will be lost! What shall he do? He pushes a chair close to the side of the buggy and climbs up on it. "Look at me, Lucette!"

She will not look. She begins to kick, she is going to cry! What shall he do?

Ah, now he remembers, the angels sing while they play the harp. Playing the harp is all very well, but how about

the singing? Trott is not very good at singing. He can't even keep a tune. He never could even learn to sing nursery rhymes. Still, there is one beautiful song—surely little sister will like that one. People sing it in the streets sometimes, in the evenings—

“They rimpure blood, our fields and hills I'd wrench.” *

“That's it, or anyway something like it; waving his arms and employing all the force of his lungs, Trott begins to sing. And all of a sudden little sister stops fidgeting. It almost seems as if her vague gaze has become fixed and that she is looking at Trott with interest. What a strange face she is making! When she is going to cry, she does not open her mouth like that. She isn't crying, she's laughing! Trott is swollen with pride and joy. He had been able to find out what she wanted all by himself. And he starts singing more lustily than ever, “They rimpure blood, our fields and hills I'd wrench.”

The carriages returning from the festival of Saint-Didier have gone by. The ladies suddenly remember the existence of Trott and Lucette and, escorted by Bertrand, come sauntering back. Nounou, arriving first, stops and cries out, “Creat heafens!”

And all stand frozen in astonishment, staring with open mouths at Trott transformed into an angel, his eyes turned

* “*Le san-gimpure, abreuver lérisson—*” The Marseillaise as it sounded to Trott.

towards the sky, his face seraphic, scraping away on the grater with a knife, and shrieking in a horribly false key a fantastic Marseillaise for a little sister who lies quivering and squirming with happiness.

Chapter 15

MADEMOISELLE LUCETTE



WHEN Trott is asked if his little sister is nice and if he enjoys playing with her, he tosses his head in a most capable and superior manner and answers:

"Lucette is very nice, but it is not fun to play with her. You see, she doesn't think of anything at all."

But when he says this, Trott, without meaning to, most certainly has perpetrated a monstrous injustice, for there is not an abstract metaphysician or lightning calculator whose brain works with an intensity as great as that of Mlle. Lucette.

Since the day when she gave forth her first "Wa-a-a-a," it is amazing what quantities of things she has accumulated. Well, perhaps one cannot say precisely that she thinks or that she understands. These are words which are at once much too clumsy and too ambitious to translate the simple and extraordinarily delicate phenomena which take place within her. It is very difficult to explain them with the heavy

words which one uses for grown people who wear high hats or silk dresses. "Papa" and "mama" are ideas that are infinitely inaccessible to Mlle. Lucette, as far off as the laws of gravity or the theories of economists. Still, she thinks in her own way. However, over the world that she perceives and over herself as well, there is a sort of fog, quite thick and uniform in its density. In this fog things happen indistinctly, things which suggest changing sensations, greatly confused as to details, very clear at times, so far as knowing whether they give pleasure or pain. When the events from outside register agreeably, Mlle. Lucette gurgles approval: "Ger-ger-ger"; when the contrary, you hear "Wa-a-a-a." Besides there is a mass of sensations which are neither pleasant nor unpleasant, hardly felt, and which she submits to, babbling with an abstracted little air. Each day, however, the number of things she really perceives increases enormously, and the fog becomes pierced with astounding gleams of light. Sometimes, as we are waking, we are aware of thoughts, very evasive, very fugitive, and there is in our spirit a troubled depth, a vague chasm into which something that has happened has evaporated. It has been too slight to stir our gross nervous system and awaken our dulled consciousness. And when we do wake up, it only flees the more rapidly as we try to force ourselves to grasp it. It is sensations of this kind, very tenuous, very numerous, infinitely varied, which strike the sensibilities of Mlle. Lucette. She does not notice them and does not bother about them. As time goes on she will

never remember them, but they pile up and accumulate day by day, and little by little they shape themselves into a pyramid that rears its head above the general fog. Because of this, the other day Mlle. Lucette began to smile when she caught sight of a ray of sunshine, she who had never before paid the slightest attention to one. And thus, since the day so far distant and yet so close when she was born, has been built up a huge educational edifice, refined, complicated, intensive. It has been formed like successive deposits in the little recording machine which the angels, after placing her in her cradle, had given her; and what is to be found now is not yet consciousness, but something very alive, very turbulent, and highly developed.

At this moment Mlle. Lucette is lying in her bassinet between her Nounou, who is sewing in a chair, and her mama who is embroidering, stretched out on the chaise-longue. She has just awakened from a nice little nap. Her eyes are turned towards the ceiling. She twists her hands, grasps first one finger and then another, drools generously, and utters little sounds like a guinea pig in high good humor. And if you would like to try to get a glimpse into that little mind, and will take my words and cover them with a thick gauze, regard them from a great distance, round off their corners, make them less precise—these words of mine which are absurdly precise and technical, whose reasoning is ridiculously logical in the far-too-mathematical form that I shall lend them—I shall try to help you in the maze-like

unwinding of the "thoughts" that go swarming through her little hairless pate.

"There is light, it comes, it shines, it caresses. It is very interesting. How it comes, the light! Must eat it! Light, it's pretty. Dark, it's ugly. This side is the light. It is very pretty. It is very gay. Must eat it. This side, it's the dark. The dark, that's ugly. It hurts. Wa-a-a-a. But on this side is light, ger-ger-ger. And over there the dark."

"Nounou, fix the baby's pillows. She has been wriggling so in her basket that she has her head lower than her heels."

"The light, must eat it, eat it or, at least, catch it. They don't move the way you want, all those little things that never stop tickling your nose and digging in your eyes, or going into your mouth. Got to catch it—wa-a-a-a."

"There, there, baby."

"Rocking, that's nice, that's like going to sleep. Those little pink fingers are interesting. Must get hold of them. It's hard. They always get away. Ah! there! No, that doesn't work! Got to scratch, scratch as hard as can be, dreadfully hard. That hurts! Well, so much the worse. Let's go on scratching. Hurts! Wa-a-a-a!"

"Oh, how stupid she is! She is scratching herself! Now will you be good, young lady?"

"There, the great big thing that moves is coming over. Not the one you suck. The other. What does she want, coming up like that? It is getting dark, must cry! No, that is funny, that is very funny. She is tickling. Got to jump,

got to make faces. It is very funny. There is a little circle of light that shines. Must catch it. But can't. That big thing is gone. Where is it? Not worth while getting angry. She left something in the fingers. Don't know what. Luckily, there is the light. But it is tiresome, that light. Have seen enough. And the dark too. Have seen them enough. . . .

"Ah, there! Something is coming in through the ears! What is it? It comes very loud through the ears! Got to cry. Ah! No, it is those things that move. There is the one you suck and lots of others stirring round. It is very ugly. It is getting dark. Not funny, the light, but it is prettier than all that. And besides I have had enough. Wa-a-a-a."

"Take her a little, Nounou, so that she will be quiet. . . ."

"She is the picture of your husband. . . ."

"It's true, but at the same time she has your poor mother's mouth exactly."

"How nice to be rocked. Yes, it shakes, it does something strange to your soul. It's very pleasant. So many things one sees! The dark, the light, and other kinds of things besides. It's interesting. It is very complicated, too. You lose your head a bit. Still it passes the time. As well that as something else. Oh, oh, something is coming. It is coming through the inside! Not through the eyes, not through the ears. It is from inside. It is coming. Where are they, all those things that move? Isn't it nearly time they should be finished poking at your eyes and ears? There are

plenty of other things to do besides paying attention to them."

"Isn't there any way of making you smile? Come, baby, come!"

"Let me alone! There is something inside there that isn't right. Really, this is a nuisance, a big nuisance. It hurts. You bother me, you big things that move. It hurts. It's got to come out! It's very hard. It hurts so. Wa-a-a-a. No, no rocking. Yes, that's the light. Yes, I know it; who cares? It hurts down there. It's got to come out, yes, got to. Colic, colic. Oh, all right. Well then, it is not very pleasant, but it is the only way. . . . There it is. *Oof!*"

"Nounou, Nounou, come quickly. The dirty little thing! Come and change her!"

"It pricks. It's unbearable. Got to cry, cry as hard as can be. Wa-a-a-a! Mustn't stop crying. It is perfectly useless for you to shove a lot of things under my eyes and ears. Doesn't do any good. No need for you to rub my face nor pat my back nor my stomach. It isn't that that's the matter. It hurts. It's horrible to live. Just horrible to live. Got to be furious, scream as loud as can be. It hurts too much in there. Not the same kind of hurt as just now. It's hollow! Got to fill it! Got to fill, fill. Wa-a-a-a-a."

"Come, Nounou, your nursling needs you. She is a charming baby. Eyes exactly like your father-in-law's."

"Give me, give me, hurry up there, the big thing one eats. Of course it's that. Hurry up, *hurry* or I shall get still

angrier. It doesn't come quickly enough, no, it doesn't. Oh, now at last! It's good. It's just right. It's fine. It is the best of everything. It *is* everything. They can gesticulate over there, those big things, but one can snap one's fingers at them. Ah, it's good; that's certain. It is getting full. It feels good. Life is sweet. . . . What's the matter? It's gone! Oh, but more, more! Not full yet! It's horrible! Treachery! Got to cry, no good to smother. Got to shriek, try to tear everything, pull out your nose, everything, everything that's left. . . ."

"What an appetite! How naughty she is! She will not give the nurse time enough to change breasts."

"Ah, at last! It's not too late. Mustn't take it away again. Got to eat a lot and then sleep. Dear, nice eating! How nice it is! It is the best of all. Everything is getting vague. Eating, there's nothing but that. And then sleep. Eat, sleep. It's the same thing. Eat, sleep . . . sleep."

Asleep. "Put her back in her bassinet very gently, Nounou."

And the deed is accomplished. Mlle. Lucette sleeps with closed fists. With good luck she will nap for an hour.

Chapter 16

THE VAGARIES OF Mlle. LUCETTE



THE small sister is a trifle less small. Her head still wobbles on her neck and, if by chance you want her to sit up alone, she slumps like an over-cooked pudding. She still wears a vague and aimless expression and drools incessantly with a pensive air, her fist in her mouth. She cries very frequently. She is almost always either hungry or sleepy. And yet she follows moving light with fixed attention, counts her fingers incessantly, and looks at them with a satisfied air. She recognizes certain people unmistakably. She laughs or cries with some semblance of reason. It is certain that she is working out within herself relationships, reflections, and observations of all sorts. Often she seems plunged in unfathomable meditation. The whole pattern of her future soul is now designing itself, but this design is very difficult to follow. There are corners that are extremely tortuous and complicated, and there are enormous voids. On certain points, it is evident, Mlle. Lucette has formed perfectly

clear ideas: to nurse is good; to be rocked is good; to sleep is good. Each thing, moreover, must appear at its proper time. It would not do, for instance, to try to put her to sleep at nursing time, for M^{lle}. Lucette would at once find means of showing her discontent. Moreover, if you are a good observer, you will easily be able to keep track of her desires in such matters. They are quite regular. But it is infinitely difficult to conceive of her reasons and of the train of other ideas which begin to emerge from the mist.

They have given her a rattle, a ball, some rubber animals, some dolls. She is completely indifferent to all these things, or, rather, they do not exist for her. She doesn't see them at all. They are simply a part of the great neutral mass which makes up the external world. On the other hand, a certain hat of mama's quite visibly excites her admiration, for she opens her mouth as wide as possible when she sees it; when she admires, it is always with her mouth. For a spoon or a ray of light, she will open her mouth just as she does for Nounou at eating time. It is evident that the beautiful creates in her a desire to eat, just as later it will inspire in her the irresistible and imperious desire to touch. But we cannot fathom the reasons which persuade her that M^{me}. Ray is worthy of being absorbed while the sight of M^{me}. Thilorier invariably makes her shut her lips in tight hostility. Moreover, she is subject to sudden changes in attitude. You have to be very reserved with her and to bend at once to her wishes. Good intentions do not satisfy her at all;

you must guess what she wants, a very complicated task because her desires vary according to unknown laws which probably depend largely on the condition of her stomach, her digestion, and all her physical being.

This unevenness of disposition leaves Trott somewhat timid in regard to his little sister. Trott is a big boy. He regards life as a serious affair in which the same causes always produce the same effects; he thinks that there are certain fixed principles, that things are invariably good or bad, false or true, beautiful or ugly. A new box of lead soldiers is pretty; Marie de Milly is pretty too; so is the big blue sky when the weather is fine. None of these things resemble each other, but they are all just as pleasant today as they were yesterday. It is always good to eat a stick of chocolate, and you are always sure that the minute Miss arrives it is going to be dull. These things are sure, regular, ordered. One would as soon expect to see Miss turn a somersault as to see the sun and the moon kissing in the middle of the sky. And people seem to Trott just as fixed as things are. They have no irregularities or caprices. They will be tomorrow just as they are today, and each one has his own immovable qualities. It is absolutely undeniable that papa is the strongest man in the world, that Miss knows more than anyone else, that Thérèse is the finest cook in the country. These things are unchangeable; you can rely on them and count on them absolutely.

There is no one but the little sister who refuses to con-

form to these habits of order and classifiability. Ever since the day when she suddenly turned from red to yellow, Trott has been a little wary of her. And really it seems that she can change her character just as she can her skin. Every day she is different. It is exceedingly upsetting. Every day Trott says good-morning to her with due propriety, but never twice has he been received in the same way. As a rule she doesn't wink an eye, but looks at him seriously with an air of complete indifference. At other times she seems to look right through him at something which is far beyond. This embarrasses him horribly and, in spite of himself, he must turn to see what is there. There are days when she condescends to laugh. Then Trott is much flattered. He shows it by giving her a little kiss. However, he doesn't enjoy doing it very much, for she still smells very much like a baby and that disgusts him, although he knows that there are times when one must overcome one's distastes. But very often, the minute Trott appears, his little sister begins to cry with all her might.

This is exactly what happened today. Trott had hardly taken a good look at her in her cradle when she turned as red as a lobster, began to twist herself like a worm and to scream like an eagle. Trott was deeply hurt. She had made faces at him yesterday and so it wouldn't have hurt her to be polite today. He tries to calm her with soothing words, but nothing works. Then he hears Nounou, who is arranging the baby's things in the dresser, begin to snicker. That

makes it twice as bad, for, after all, it is very good of Trott to put himself to so much trouble. Ah! so you won't be nice to those who are nice to you! Just wait a minute! And Trott, puckering his nose, wrinkling his forehead, blowing out his cheeks and sticking out his tongue, contorts his face into a truly horrible grimace ending in a grotesque sucking of the lips.

At this, little sister starts to wave her arms and legs while her mouth, empty of teeth, melts into a smile of pure joy. This only disconcerts Trott again. Doesn't she understand anything at all, this little sister of his? This idea impresses Trott, for it must be very tiresome not to understand a single thing. If she doesn't realize how papa and mama and Trott and everybody love her, she must be very sad. And then, since she doesn't understand, there must be many things she can't explain. Perhaps when you try to kiss her, she thinks you are going to hurt her. Perhaps it frightens her when you smile. And perhaps she sees only giants all around, very strong ones, who could suddenly crush her, grind her up into crumbs. Suddenly he feels very tender toward her. Poor Lucette! If only she could understand how good his intentions are and that he doesn't want anything to hurt her!

Trott stretches his hand toward his little sister and she grips a finger. There, and she won't let go! Perhaps it is the beginning of the longed-for and frequently proffered alliance. At any rate it is very nice and he feels called upon to

cement it solemnly. In spite of her little odor, Trott bends over, but at that moment Lucette's other hand vigorously grabs a fistful of hair and she sets about pulling it lustily as though she were hanging on to a bell-rope. Trott is a bit delicate. He yelps, frees himself, and straightens up as quickly as he can.

All the good effect of his gentleness is lost. Mlle. Lucette frowns, looks at Trott uncertainly a moment, and then, tossing her two arms in the air, gives forth the shrieks of the damned. No luck! Trott goes off with a heavy heart and betakes himself to the garden where he strolls, thoughtfully rehearsing his discomfiture. It is hard to digest so many failures, but Trott has no rancor in his soul and by the time the lunch bell rings he is serene again. It only takes patience. Perhaps Lucette will be nice tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that. After all, she is so little!

Chapter 17

THE DARK ANGEL



THERE is something heavy weighing on the house, like a thick veil of sadness that has fallen upon it. It is a very thick veil. One does not know how to get rid of it.

Little sister is sick.

The other evening she was very red. She laughed too hard. She tossed her legs about. It was impossible to quiet her. Mama said, "How lively she is!" but papa did not feel comfortable. During the night she began to cough. In the morning the doctor came. He looked at her, he tapped her on the front and on the back, listening all the time. Finally he said that it was a severe bronchitis and that it would be necessary to be very careful, otherwise—he shook his head like a fat pigeon and rolled his eyes behind his glasses—otherwise it might be very serious. Papa became somewhat pale, mama began to cry like a fountain, and Nounou, at the shock of his verdict, sat right down on the baby's wash-basin which was on the chair behind her. As for

Trott, he was horror-stricken. When people are very sick, sometimes they die. Could it be that Lucette might die?

Poor little Lucette! She looked so tired! Always before, the instant she had one eye open she started her perpetual motion, an endless milling of arms and legs. It seemed as if there were a thousand tiny springs which coiled and uncoiled without cease; this one just *had* to move, that one to jump, and that one to spin around. She made faces, she gave little cries, she laughed, she peeped like a baby bird. One got tired for her, seeing her making all these movements. Now all is changed. She does not cry any more; she does not laugh. She is very quiet. She lies quite straight, utterly silent, very pale, with such tiny, shriveled cheeks. From time to time a dry cough shakes her. Then she becomes all red. It is easy to see that it hurts her. She twists herself. Her lips quiver as if she wanted to cry, but she does not cry. Crying is too hard work. One can hear queer little noises in her chest. Trott smiles at her in vain, and makes encouraging signs. She does not look at him. She keeps her eyes half closed nearly all the time, with such a tired little air, and, when she does lift her eyelids, she seems to see in front of her things that are invisible to the others in the room.

What can she be looking at like that? In spite of himself, Trott follows the direction of her eyes as if he expected to see something surprising. She to whom everything has been of equal value, what strange thing can she be watching so absorbedly? And suddenly a thought freezes Trott's

heart. Who knows but that, there against the ceiling, she is looking at the angels whom she left such a little while ago? Who knows whether they are not making signs to her with their spreading wings? Who knows if, finally, so tired of living, she will not go back to them, to that beautiful heaven which she misses so much, where no one ever gets hurt and where nobody ever cries? And, standing beside the tiny feeble figure, Trott feels a great anguish seize him, vaguely sensing the nearness of unknown and irresistible forces from whose will there is no appeal.

Very low, bending over close to the little ear, he murmurs tender advice: she must be very patient, must be good about taking her medicine and not make mama and papa feel so badly, mama who would be lost if she should go with the angels, papa who is so kind, and Trott who would feel so dreadfully. Before this, sometimes little sister was a nuisance. She cried when you wanted to be quiet. She would be in mama's lap just when Trott wanted to jump into it himself. She slept when you wanted to make a noise, but now Trott feels that way down deep underneath he loves her, down very, very deep, and if she went he would not be comforted, even with Puss, his kitty, or Jip, his black poodle. One time Trott had been sick himself. How uncomfortable he felt then! Can poor little Lucette be feeling as badly as that? Why does the good God allow such a thing?

Why does God allow such a thing? Trott repeats this question, and, for the first time in his life, a vague disquiet,

something that perhaps he will recall later on, fills him completely. Why allow such a thing, God who is so kind and so powerful? Why let his mother feel so badly? Perhaps He is not paying attention; perhaps He is busy with other things; but no, He hears everything; He knows everything. M. le Curé said so only the other day. He knows that Lucette is sick. He lets her be sick. Why? Perhaps this is something only big people know. He must ask them. But it is impossible to speak to mama or papa. They are too preoccupied. Miss is English; perhaps her ideas on this subject are not entirely correct. And Jane, and Thérèse, and Nounou, and Bertrand, they don't know enough. Mme. de Tréan would know, but he can't go to her house now. . . .

It has been a terrible night. Trott happened to wake up. On the floor above him he heard that dreadful little dry cough. He heard, too, the sounds of the footsteps of people coming and going. It must be that little sister is getting worse. In the heaviness of night Trott felt as if a weight were crushing him. In the morning when he was up, he realized that everything was going badly. Papa had creases in his forehead; mama wasn't even visible. Trott was not allowed to go near his little sister. Everything was in great confusion. It seemed as if something new were in the house, and that something else were not there any longer. Without knowing why, Trott thought of the black people who sometimes passed the house carrying black

boxes. And some of those boxes were very tiny. . . .

The doctor came early. Trott was wandering about the garden with that stupid Jip who did not realize what was happening and who wanted to play. The portly figure of the doctor passed quickly by him, carried briskly on its short legs. He looked very wise, M. le Docteur, with his gray hair and his glasses. An idea! He who takes care of very sick people, surely he is the one who can tell Trott. . . .

M. le Docteur is outside the door and on the steps. He shakes hands with papa, says a few words, and goes on down the walk.

A shrill little voice hails him: "M. le Docteur!"

He lifts his head and perceives Trott barring his path.

"Are you going to make my little sister well very fast?"

"I hope so, my little man, I certainly hope so."

"Tell me, please, why does God let my little sister be sick?"

M. le Docteur looks embarrassed. He coughs. He quails before Trott's direct gaze.

"All little children get sick sometimes. They have to, so that they may be well afterwards."

This explanation does not satisfy Trott; still he cannot insist. However, if all little children are like that, he feels some reassurance.

"M. le Docteur, she isn't going to die, and the angels won't carry her away?"

M. le Docteur is troubled. He is a father himself. He

remembers a little daughter he has lost. Finally he manages to say, "No, little man, we will take such good care of her and watch her so closely that the angels will not take her away from us."

This answer satisfies Trott. He meditates upon it after the doctor has gone. It is very important to "watch" little sister carefully. That means that someone must be close to her all the time, must hold her, and caress her. That is the reason that papa and mama never leave her and that someone is always near her crib. That way, if the angels come, they can't take her. It is all clear now. Trott turns these thoughts over and over all through the day. In the evening, after he has prayed very hard, the same old thoughts come leaping about him, even while he is asleep. His sleep is disturbed. Crowds of angels with black wings escape from under his hands. Suddenly he wakes up in the middle of all the black, just as he did the night before. At first he does not know where he is. But there is that little cough that makes him shiver. Now he remembers, and an appalling anguish grips him. Everywhere, everything seems silent. No one is moving. Suppose—perhaps everyone is asleep, perhaps no one will hear and the black angel will come very softly . . .

Trott is afraid of the dark. He is afraid of the cold. He is afraid of being alone. He can do nothing himself, surely. He listens as hard as he can. There are tiny noises, vague, evil. One can *hear* the terrible black silence that envelops

the house. And then the little cough suddenly starts up again, and it seems as if there is a deep sigh. . . .

The door of Trott's bedroom opens. A light step glides along the stair. More softly still the door of Lucette's bedroom is opened. The pale gleam of a night-lamp falls upon a little white phantom. It is not the dreaded angel. The little phantom seats itself silently in a chair at the side of the cradle. It bends over the little creature lying asleep and takes one of the thin little hands. Now she is "watched over." The angel cannot take her. Little by little the head of the tiny phantom droops, its neck bends, and when, at the first gleam of day, mama wakes suddenly and starts toward the baby, happy that she has passed a better night, she cannot keep back a cry of surprise as she sees, leaning on the cradle of his little sister who is peacefully asleep, Trott in his white nightgown, stiff with cold, asleep, a tender barrier which the unknown angel dare not try to pass.

Chapter 18

A CONQUEROR CONQUERED



LITTLE sister is well. She is so well, in fact, that it seems that her illness has done her good. She is much more grown up. She is happier, stronger. She holds her head straight now, just as Trott does, and she can look to right or left and keep these positions all alone without the least danger. When you offer her something, she takes it of her own accord, grasping it hard. However, she still shows very little interest in most objects and the operations she must go through to seize one are still very toilsome. She has to make several laborious attempts before she can succeed in grasping it and, when at length she has it, she does nothing with her trophy but wave it aimlessly. In spite of this she has very clear preferences. For instance, it is easy to see that she has a great predilection for a piece of marshmallow root; she deliberately rams it way down her throat and chews on it intently with great perseverance. She is less frequently bad-tempered. But her instincts become more and more despotic

and, like Napoleon I, she insists that all her desires must be immediately foreseen and realized. But it is not always easy to discover them. Then Mlle. Lucette throws herself backwards with an unmistakable expression on her face, followed by piercing outcries which aim to explain the situation to the denser members of the audience. It appears that all these demonstrations are perfectly legitimate. At first they said she was too little. Now it seems she is teething. But Trott is getting teeth himself and, furthermore, he lost one the other day and two others are loose. Well then, what do you suppose would happen if it suddenly occurred to him to give Jane a kick in the face while she was dressing him! However, Trott is a big boy while Lucette is a tiny little girl; that makes all the difference.

Trott's relations with humanity in general and with the different members of his family in particular have been gradually but greatly modified since the advent of Mlle. Lucette, for he is no longer the only child and, most important of all, he has lost his position as the youngest. From this fact spring quantities of new situations.

Trott has always been a very good little boy, never badly spoiled. He never quarreled with other children; on the contrary he was sweet about giving in willingly, particularly to little girls just because they were girls, and to big boys because they were apt to give you a good whack if you didn't. As for little babies, he had never been much interested in them. But at home it was an accepted fact that

he was supreme. Of course, mama and papa were very important people, but that did not detract from Trott's supremacy. He realized the gravity of his acts and movements, even of his slightest words. He understood, too, the compliment paid him when he was asked to appear before visitors, and in a vague way he felt himself to be a sort of very precious toy which was at the same time a unique phenomenon. And in the depths of him lay a suspicion that the world was created for him alone. After all, why not, since he was the smallest? . . .

But he was no longer the smallest. And from this fact flowed a new orientation of his whole world. There was someone in the house who was much more delicate. And this someone was not a little animal, a dog, a cat, a bird, that you could pet one moment and forget the next; it was a little child who grew, who occupied your constant thoughts, who was already a little person. Everyone was preoccupied with her, flocking around her, caring for her, wanting to see her and caress her. She had already made a large place for herself in the household. Now that Trott understood that they loved him just as much as they used to, he was certainly not jealous, oh, not at all! especially as he himself felt that his little sister occupied a big corner of his heart. But anyhow, he couldn't help thinking once in a while that he was tired of not being as important as he used to be.

Of course it wasn't much fun to have all of your move-

ments watched and commented on, nor to be kissed and hugged by every visitor; still, at bottom, even this had something flattering about it. Formerly, if he so much as sneezed or had the least stomachache, there was general consternation; now they merely said, "Use your handkerchief," or "You've eaten too much," and that was all.

Happily there are compensations, big compensations. One is that Trott is now superior to someone, with an undisputed, permanent superiority which fills him with pride. There is someone who is less big, less strong, less agile, less old than he. Next to his little sister, he, who was always called "my little man," is a colossus, a giant, something really superb. And so, out of Lucette's tininess he has discovered a prodigious greatness in himself. If he wished, he could crush her, like that, with a single movement, or carry her like a parcel, or do anything he wanted with her. Of course, he doesn't dream of doing such a thing; he wouldn't hurt her for anything in the world. And as for carrying her, they haven't let him so far, although he is plenty strong enough and, besides, he himself would be afraid he might break her. But anyhow, if he wanted to he could do it; and if he doesn't want to, it's because he is kind. Yes, it is Trott's kindness that makes him interested in this little nobody, that makes him descend from his heights to her lowly place. Ah! That surely is a great consolation when you think of being deposed in so many other ways.

The other day, for instance, Nounou was walking with

the baby in the garden. Trott went out to tell her with a very cocksure air that she must be careful lest the baby take cold. Yes, Trott has felt it the duty of his superior wisdom to supply the lack of it in his little sister. He realizes how great is her weakness compared to his strength. When he is sitting next to her, he compares with satisfaction his large hands to her tiny pink fingers and he feels seized with a slightly disdainful pity. That is because he is a superior being. Here is the proof: today mama has actually entrusted little sister solely to him. Mama, baby, and he were together in the nursery while Jane and Nounou were out on some errands. Suddenly Thérèse came in to say that a young lady was waiting with a hat for mama. Mama said to Trott, "Stay here a moment with your little sister. I'll be back in five minutes."

And Trott, overflowing with vanity, stayed with Lucette all alone.

Mlle. Lucette is sitting comfortably in her bassinet in the middle of a mass of pillows. She looks to right and left with a lordly air, seemingly quite unconscious of her inferiority. Trott considers her ironically. How good-for-nothing she is, next to him! He can play on the floor, making up games with pieces of wood and soldiers—here are the French and here are the Germans. . . . Mama made no mistake in trusting him with his little sister. He knows how to make her listen to reason. He goes close to her. "See here, if you're not good, I'll spank you."

This isn't true. Trott would never do such a thing. But it pleases him to make this announcement in order to affirm his power. Mlle. Lucette doesn't seem impressed. She looks at Trott indifferently, shakes her rattle in the air, then, stretching her hand out to the edge of the bassinet, throws it on the floor. Very condescendingly Trott picks it up and gives it to her.

"Don't do that again."

And he goes back to his French and Prussians, who are ready for a great battle. A winsome smile flits over Mlle. Lucette's lips. She looks at her rattle and shakes it furiously. But suddenly, bang! there it is again on the floor. Trott obligingly disturbs himself again and restores the object to the young lady, who, with the most amiable air in the world, immediately throws it down. Then Trott is irritated. He picks it up and says with severity, "If you throw it down again, you can't have it any more."

He has hardly reached his armies when he hears a clatter on the floor. Now he is in a very bad humor. No, he will not be bothered again, and he looks at Mlle. Lucette defiantly. She returns his gaze. It almost seems as if she were taking his measure. Doubtless the result of the examination shows her that Trott is not of a caliber to struggle with her and that she will easily be victor. She knits her brows, gives two or three little grunts, ominous warnings . . .

Trott sighs and hurries to her. If Lucette cries, mama will hear and will scold Trott for not even knowing how to

amuse his little sister. A fourth time he picks up the rattle and offers it to her resignedly. But it is probable that this delay has offended the young lady. She deigns not even a glance at the rattle and drops it disgustedly when Trott tries to put it between her fingers. After all, if she doesn't want it . . .

But Trott has scarcely started to leave when a fresh avalanche of complaints brings him back to his post. He feels less proud and studies his sister uneasily. What on earth does she want? He would much rather play with his soldiers than fuss with this doll-baby. But there is no choice. At the least sign of withdrawal, Mlle. Lucette sets up the most alarming contortions and then nothing that you offer her will satisfy her. Trott presents her, quite uselessly, with a rubber dog, the doll, the marshmallow root itself. Mlle. Lucette does not so much as honor them with a glance. But when she sees Trott's hand with a piece of wood in it, she grabs his finger and gleefully sets about wiggling it. Trott is far from approving. This young person is altogether too demanding. She holds on to him like a little hook. If he should start to leave, she would yell with all her might, and Trott doesn't like that kind of music. And besides, a big boy oughtn't to make his little sister cry. With a regretful glance at his French soldiers and his inactive Prussians, Trott remains on the floor beside the bassinet. This is anything but pleasant. The floor is very hard, and he can't even change his position. If he budges, there are menacing signals. Trott

feels uncomfortable and a little humiliated. How long will this last? Mama ought to be coming back.

Mlle. Lucette fingers Trott's hand with the air of a connoisseur; she scratches his skin and pinches his flesh and rubs it, but without showing the least sign of recognition. This is altogether unpleasant, but one could stand it if at least she seemed satisfied. But no, after a moment she is after something else. She pulls hard on Trott's hand and once more begins to knit her brow like a little Napoleon. What on earth does she want now? Trott feels himself the plaything of a mysterious force. There is no resisting it—he follows the movement.

Ah! no! Not that! She is too dirty, this sister of his! What do you think she wants! She wants to stick Trott's finger into her mouth and suck it! No! First of all, it's not the proper thing for a girl to do. It simply isn't done. And besides, Trott is horribly disgusted. No, it's impossible. And since that's the case . . .

With a firm gesture Trott frees his hand. For a second Mlle. Lucette stares with astonishment at her rebel slave. This is the way to treat her; you must be firm, very f . . . Oh, oh dear! What's up now? Suddenly Mlle. Lucette lowers her brows, shuts her eyes, becomes very red, wriggles her hands two or three times, and, with a stiffening of her body, throws herself back and emits the most frightful protests; her arms and legs wave frantically and her apoplectic face turns from side to side among the white pillows while from

the yawning cavern in the middle of it escape sounds that defy description.

"Lucette, Lucette!"

Trott is lost. He dissolves in cajoling words, he overwhelms her with endearments, he offers his hand to the little curled and restless fingers. Nothing works. He is in despair. Where is his superior pride? He feels himself the lowest of the low, disdained, a panting prey at the mercy of a superior being's will. How appease the gods when they are angry? And an idea born of despair flashes into his mind. He will act as did the Roman fellow who threw himself into the breach. He will offer himself deliberately, a propitiatory victim. . . . And so, heroically, he plunges his finger into the open mouth.

This pitiful capitulation has disarmed the enemy. Her color subsides, her gyrations diminish, her two hands meet around Trott's finger, and with an air of satisfied desire she sets to work to suck voluptuously, with expressive little grunts, drooling contentedly, and rolling a menacing eye the moment she suspects an attempt at escape.

As for Trott, disgust and humiliation compete for his heart; the sensation of his wet finger, licked and dripping, is extraordinarily repugnant. He is crushed in defeat. He, Trott, a big boy, has been vanquished and made ridiculous by that little snip of femininity. He is reduced to the rôle of substitute for a marshmallow root or a Nounou. He is cramped all over, he needs his handkerchief, his back itches,

and a thousand other discomforts torture him. But he cannot move; he is crushed, beaten. Passively he feels little rivulets of saliva trickle down his hand. Can he ever wash them off, all these horrors?

At last he hears a quick step in the hall. Mama hurries in.

"Well, I think Lucette has been very good."

Lucette sees her mama. She forgets her prisoner and gives a gurgle of joy. Trott has hastily withdrawn his hand. No one has seen his disgrace. He will go wash right away.

"You have taken good care of her, Trott. . . ."

Mama is very gracious. But within himself Trott thinks it is rather Lucette who has taken care of him, and, before he escapes, he throws a last, almost fearful look at his vanquisher who is executing a triumphal dance in her mother's arms.

Babies are much stronger than one would think!

Chapter 19

POOR JIP!



Miss has just gone. What luck! It's amazing how long she stays. No one would believe an hour could last so long as the one which she spends with Trott. It is longer than all the rest of the day. And oh, how bored one gets! Just fearfully bored! Before her arrival, Trott feels a particular kind of general uncomfortableness. It is like a visit to the dentist, only not quite so dreadful. Or like having to come into the drawing-room to say good-afternoon to a lady one does not know.

The moment Miss appears in the doorway Trott gets a slight stomachache, and the moment she begins to take off her veil he feels an enormous lassitude descending gradually upon him. During the whole of the first half-hour, all the while the minute hand is descending, this lassitude increases, becomes heavier and heavier, fills him with a growing torpor. He has all the difficulty in the world in getting the words of his fable out of his mouth, or in answering

Miss's questions. Sometimes he isn't able to say even the things he knows very well; he is too bored. But hardly has the minute hand grazed the half-hour mark and commenced to ascend, when suddenly Trott's spirits begin to lighten and rise. Soon they are rising much too high, for here he is, in spite of all his efforts, unable to sit in his chair. It is as if electric currents were passing through his legs, currents which soon begin to discharge. In spite of himself he twists in his chair, looks out the window; his legs stretch and tap under the table. Yesterday before he knew it, he found himself giving Miss a kick right in the shin. It sounded as if he had hit a piece of wood. Finally he gets into a sort of nervous excitement, of general exasperation which shakes all his muscles. Gloomily he keeps his eye on the mantel; he answers every which way, looking at but one thing, the minute hand which goes up, up . . . and when the hour of deliverance arrives, when Miss has closed her note-book and has picked up her umbrella or her parasol, Trott's heart leaps with superhuman joyfulness, such as the Israelites must have felt when they were escaping from Egypt. Miss is hardly out of the door when there breaks out a frenzy of leaps, capers, shouts, and laughs. He simply must dissipate the energy stored up by his boredom.

Ordinarily Trott goes to play with his little sister at this time. But today she has not yet returned from her walk. No one knows which way they have gone, so Trott cannot go to meet them. His mama says to him:

"Go run about the garden for a while. You will at least be out in the fresh air."

That isn't much fun, but, after all, the main thing is to be moving and shouting. An idea strikes him. He will get Jip to play with him. His nice black poodle, where is he anyway?

For several days Trott has hardly seen him. It has been so absorbing to have a little sister. Come on, Jip! Jip!

Mama says he must be in the kitchen. Trott rushes there and, curled up on the seat of a chair, he sees a fat black ball; it is Jip.

"Jip!"

The ball does not stir. At one end gleams a yellow eye. At the other, a tiny pompon which serves as a tail becomes slightly agitated.

"Jip, come here!"

Jip decides to lift his head, looks at Trott, opens his mouth very wide, and yawns. Then he drops his head back on his paws as if he wanted to go to sleep again.

Trott is offended. He seizes the chair and shakes it as hard as he can. Jip must perforce descend.

Old Thérèse says, "Poor creature, he's getting old, same as I am."

Finally Jip decides to tumble off the chair and follow Trott. However, he seems to do this out of sheer mechanical obedience and without any great interest on his part. He goes with slow, short steps, as if he were counting them, and

without wagging his tail or lifting his head. What is the matter with him, Jip who has always been so exuberant heretofore? Even outdoors he takes a long time to limber up. He merely trots at his master's side with a resigned countenance. How grouchy he has become, poor Jip!

Finally, between kindly exhortations and admonitions, he commences to brighten up and at last he is galloping and barking at Trott's side, exactly as in former days. Hurrah! They run wildly about the garden. There is one game in particular that is great fun. You have to turn the chairs upside down on the ground and jump over them at the same time. Jip jumps very well; Trott's attempts are less distinguished, but he gets over just the same. It is an extremely difficult trick, exactly like those they do in the circus. What a pity there are no spectators!

Ah, there is little sister coming in. She is sitting in the carriage, with Nounou, majestic as always, pushing her.

"Good morning, Lucette."

She is very alluring at this time. She honors Trott with an amiable smile and bubbles two or three times. This is a special favor. She adds a clucking that indicates high good humor. Here is a ready-made audience. Perhaps Lucette will not understand the game very well, being so young, but certainly Nounou must be a great admirer of steeple-chase.

"Look, Lucette, look, Nounou, see how nice it is, what we are going to do. Come, Jip!"

Jip isn't here. Where is he? Oh, there he is, sitting way off. His back is partly turned and he is looking absorbedly at the ground, for all the world as though he were afraid of being indiscreet.

"Jip!"

Jip doesn't budge. Such sulks! It is too much. Trott rushes upon him, gives him two smart blows, and drags him by the collar close to the little sister. Jip passively allows himself to be dragged.

"Come on, Jip, now run with me and jump."

Trott starts forward. As for Jip, he sits back on his haunches. It seems as if his mustaches are thinner and his muzzle more elongated. Instead of raising his ears as he always does when he plays, he lets them fall quite flat against his head. He looks squarely at Trott with his yellow eyes, licks his chops, and, without moving a paw, gently taps his tail as if he wanted to say, "I understand perfectly, but the whole matter leaves me cold."

Trott is highly indignant. Twice, three times, he starts with no more success than the first time. It is most irritating. Trott begins to scold. Jip droops his head submissively, but he flatly refuses to obey.

"But don't you see, Jip, it is to amuse little sister?"

Trott, who is very strong, takes Jip's two forepaws in his hands and forces him to stand up alongside of Lucette's carriage.

"Look at little sister, how nice she is!"

Lucette stretches out her hand to caress Jip or perhaps to grab a handful of his curls . . . there is not time to see which; Jip makes a sudden movement of his head, gives an ugly growl, and runs off as fast as his legs can carry him, the pompon of his tail almost dragging on the ground.

Trott is astounded. Jip, his good Jip, has growled! He wanted to bite little sister. He sulked and is not a bit nice any more. What is the matter? Nounou, the psychologist, says with a hearty laugh, "He is chellous."

Chellous! Jip is chellous! That must mean jealous! Of whom? Of little sister? Can it be possible?

Perhaps it is true. How horrid he is and how hard Trott is going to whip him! Trott begins to hunt for him and, while hunting, he keeps turning over and over in his head this naughtiness of Jip's. After all, in the old days, Jip and Trott were almost inseparable. Every day they had such good times together. Since little sister is here, especially since she has become so nice, things are not at all the same between Jip and himself. Trott has not paid any attention at all to Jip these last days. He has hardly seen him. The other day he even gave him a rap with his hoop-stick because he wanted to play when Trott was in a hurry to say good-night to Lucette. All this hurt Jip's feelings and he is jealous. He sees that no one pays any more attention to him. He thinks no one loves him any more. And so he is sad. A little memory taps at Trott's heart. Isn't it true that formerly, way at the beginning, he himself had been a little like poor Jip? And

even now isn't there sometimes the tiniest bit of that jealous feeling again when he sees someone give one of his toys to Lucette or kiss her or pet her a little too long?

Trott reddens at the thought even though he is all alone. Perhaps it is something like that that is the matter with Jip. It is certainly disagreeable to be forgotten. It hurts you a lot. Trott had thought he had been abandoned, he who knows how much his parents love him, and yet he is a little boy and much more intelligent than a poor dog. Jip is only an animal, a very good, kind animal, and here he has been treated as if he were entirely forgotten. Such a good friend as he is! Once, when Trott was sick, he had come so often to whine at the door that they had had to chain him up, and the day he saw Trott again he had gone crazy with joy. Puss had not acted like that. Puss wouldn't be hurt if he were forgotten. He is an egoist who has no affection for others, and cares not a whit whether he is loved or not, provided only he has his milk and his cushion; but as for Jip, he is all heart. He is happy when people love him, and is miserable when they do not, and he cannot tell anyone about it, and no one comforts him. All he can do is to take melancholy refuge in the kitchen where Thérèse sometimes shoves him roughly about.

Trott is greatly moved. He has hunted the garden up and down without finding Jip. Perhaps he has returned to Thérèse. Trott must find him to console him. . . . But Jip has not even been able to get back into the kitchen. The

door is closed. So he is lying tight against it, waiting for someone to come and open it. Then he catches sight of Trott. He begins to wag his tail feebly and to make embarrassed little movements, and when Trott draws near, he lowers his head humbly, as if he were expecting to be whipped. He has an iron conscience, poor Jip, the conscience of a faithful soldier, or of a Christian martyr. He knows he must suffer without self-defense, and remorse for having acted badly adds to his sadness to crush him.

Trott calls, "Jip, dear, good Jip!"

Jip hesitantly approaches his master with little, fearsome steps. Trott is sitting on the grass. Jip drags himself up to him and offers himself for the deserved punishment. Trott is touched. He nearly cries to see him so repentant and so sad. So, to console him, he plants a big kiss on his shiny black muzzle.

Then, just as when the sun's rays suddenly pierce the clouds, Jip's sadness becomes illumined and disappears. He knows he is pardoned and, to show his relief, he tries to lick Trott's face. Trott gently defends himself, and holds him quiet. He puts an arm around his neck and proceeds to explain to him very softly the complications of life. Jip does not understand everything; perhaps he understands almost nothing of all this, but surely he does understand that Trott loves him and that they are reconciled. That is all that is necessary.

The dinner-bell rings. Trott and Jip make their entrance

side by side. Seeing them, papa cries out, "Good old Jip! I'm glad you brought him. We haven't seen him at all recently."

And Jip wags his tail and comes to greet each one with the air of a poor relation who notices all of a sudden that people are thinking about him but who does not know how to commence thanking them, too happy to retain any rancor for having been forgotten for so long. As for Trott, he thinks Jip is the most loving dog in the world, and, remembering his own pain at being forgotten, he leans down quickly to give Jip a pat that is even tenderer than any of the rest he has given him.

Chapter 20

CONCERNING MARVELS



It might seem to some that the life of Mlle. Lucette passed in a most monotonous way. Each day she awoke at about the same hour of the morning and went to sleep at about the same hour in the evening. Her meals and her naps succeeded each other at regular intervals. She was angry periodically and periodically had spells of joy. Other more intimate functions were accomplished with the same punctuality. Any abnormal change in this program was a signal for trouble in the bosom of the family.

In spite of all this apparent regularity, the existence of Mlle. Lucette was none the less a succession of marvelous events and of phenomena which touch on the miraculous. Trott does not notice these astonishing things, but, whenever a visitor calls, his mama starts talking about the astonishing doings and actions of Mlle. Lucette. The other day you would have sworn she was going to say "papa"; another time, she positively smiled when she saw her grand-

mother's picture; for quite a while now, her face has assumed expressions altogether new, really unbelievable. A period of twenty-four hours rarely passes without producing some such development, not always so manifestly wonderful but always worthy of great interest.

Trott feels a little humiliated because he cannot appreciate the fullness of all these marvels. There is no doubt that his mother sees things that he does not even suspect, but, after all, this is quite natural since he is only a little boy. In any case he is most willing to be enthusiastic. When one of these great phenomena occurs which inflame even the most incredulous, he is ready to take his part in the inevitable joyous concert and try to make up for his involuntary coldness by an exaggerated admiration.

It was almost immediately after her birth that Mlle. Lucette began to astonish the world. She had been in existence only three days when she could distinguish perfectly night and day, light and dark. She laughed when three weeks old, positively she laughed. Her papa claimed that she was only making a face. That is absolutely false. Granted she *was* making a face (if you care to call it that), but it was a good-natured face, therefore it could well be called a smile, and to smile so young is very remarkable.

Soon she recognized mama and Nounou and Trott and papa. She made perfectly intelligible little signs—very extraordinary! Then she began to be naughty on purpose—perfectly adorable!—and to make little faces—really too

delicious! Then followed innumerable quantities of other astonishing things. It almost seemed as if one were living in the days of miracles.

Sometimes, we must admit, Trott did not find all this very interesting, for, to tell the truth, he couldn't always understand exactly what he should admire. But lately it had been getting easier. Who could describe the emotion, the universal pride, the tribal satisfaction that flooded the family on the day when, in her desire to watch Trott and his soldiers, Mlle. Lucette, who was lying in her bassinet, grasped the two sides so vigorously with her fists that, with a mighty struggle which left her face scarlet, she found herself sitting up by herself? Tears sprang to Nounou's eyes and she rushed to the kitchen to bring old Thérèse to be a witness to the miracle. Mama clapped her hands and kissed her daughter frantically. Papa smiled with a calm, pleased air that tried hard to appear indifferent. Trott jumped up and down, yelling at the top of his voice, and Jip, excited by the uproar, began to gambol about the room, barking like crazy—so much so that the young heroine, startled by all the commotion, began to roll her eyes uncertainly and finally burst into despairing wails. But they picked her up, one after the other; they overwhelmed her with flattery, and a few minutes later, when they put her back into the bassinet, lo and behold! with the identical struggle Mlle. Lucette sat up again! And this time it was to the accompaniment of the satisfied, ecstatic smiles of dev-

otees whose prayers have been answered. You see, it was not by chance; it was a true and verified accomplishment! The child could now sit up alone!

Since that time, difficult as it is to credit it, there have been still more astonishing phenomena, among them one which assuredly no one would have even suspected. Doubtless it manifests itself in some other children; perhaps, in the large, in all; but in the others it is quite unimportant because it isn't the same thing. There never has been anyone—there never will be anyone so—who has as much—well, you understand. There is no one else. This exceptional child, after barely eight months of terrestrial existence has—she has cut a tooth! A tooth which was the first of its kind. We have been awaiting the event for several days. Mlle. Lucette has been in a very bad humor, changing color easily, drooling copiously, constantly rubbing her swollen gums with her hands—all warning signals. Each morning, with beating heart, mama conducted an inspection. The other day there appeared a tiny little cut, but it was too soon to dare speak of it, while today *it* is here. It is here. Mama rushed like a hurricane to papa's study to bring him the news. Though calmer, papa had nevertheless shown a keen satisfaction and, as happens on all solemn occasions, the entire household assembled to verify the miracle. You can't quite see the tooth yet, it is true, but you can feel something with your finger. . . .

It is mama's pink finger which is inserted first, then

papa's big finger, then Nounou's fat one, then the thin one of Jane, and then the wrinkled one of old Thérèse. Doubtless convention requires Trott to offer his too. He holds it out, but mama says, "No, dear, it's not necessary. And besides, your hands may not be very clean."

Trott feels a little rebuffed. Certainly, if you come down to fine points, his hands are not completely immaculate, but after all, they aren't much dirtier than the others'. Who knows whether Thérèse's or Nounou's . . . Trott is polite. He keeps silent. After all, it's the same to him. He wasn't so anxious to stick his finger into Lucette's mouth. It's not so pleasant as all that. If he offered to, it was because he thought it was the thing to do. It's plain to see, anyway, that she has had enough of this tasting of all the fingers in the family. So, for a change, they put a spoon in her mouth. They rap it gently against her gum. It appears to make a little noise.

"Do you hear it, Trott?"

Trott isn't quite sure, but, since the others hear, he surely ought to hear it also, even though he doesn't really. After all, if mama says so, the tooth is there.

The ladies who come to visit that day do not seem to have equal confidence. Each one strips off her glove and insists on performing the experiment herself. Within himself Trott pities his little sister and admires her patience. A barley sugar would be preferable. It must become exceedingly aggravating. Well, to each age its trials.

Two days later a tiny white line appeared on the upper gum. Then Trott proudly announced to Marie de Milly that he had a little sister who had a tooth, not a complete one yet, but a good piece of one anyway. And he felt bigger to be the brother of such a little marvel. Besides, she didn't stop with that. They soon discovered another and then two more. It seems that this will continue. Who knows? Some day she may have as many as Trott, who is beginning to lose his.

Of course it is infinitely wonderful that Mlle. Lucette should have a tooth. But after all, you grow accustomed to it very quickly, and after a while it ceases to excite you very much. There is another phenomenon much more interesting. It is that little sister has begun to walk on all fours.

This did not happen in a day. When she had learned how to sit alone she also very quickly learned to turn over on her stomach. The first days, she got her legs tangled a little because they stayed underneath instead of sliding to one side. But with a little practice she succeeded in maneuvering them much more handily. Then she could easily turn over on her stomach and in this position found a veritable joy. She wriggled her arms and legs, raised herself on her hands, then let herself fall, disported herself in various contortions and in much conversation, and was perfectly aware of the admiration she never failed to arouse. But with that, her repertoire ended. One could not ask for more. The most flattering remarks and the most persuasive urgings had no

further effect than to cause her to multiply the same movements, and "to navigate further on the pit of her stomach," as papa said. She could not succeed in completing the hugely complicated act of co-ordinating the movements of her arms and legs so as to cover an appreciable distance on the floor. This stage lasted several days; then suddenly one fine morning, without rime or reason, after several fruitless attempts and several collapses on her stomach or her nose, behold her, through who knows what mysterious means, unmoored at last, at least a yard's voyage away before she fell back on the floor. This is really prodigious!

There exist ill-disposed or malicious people who pretend to sneer at each advance of Mlle. Lucette. For example, Captain de Martinet, a friend of papa's, seems to be scoffing inside his big beard on each of these occasions. This conduct enrages Trott exceedingly. If mama admires a thing, that proves that it is admirable, and so even the biggest captain in the world had better keep still and admire it too. What will he say about it, this Captain de Martinet, when he knows that Lucette has propelled herself alone from the arm-chair clear to the table, that baby who, only a few months ago, was living in the sky, where naturally you can't learn to walk (you'd sink into a cloud) and who, when she came down to the earth, was nothing but a little whimpering lump?

And she didn't stop there! For some time now, by holding her under the arms, they have been trying to teach her

to stand straight like a big person. It appears—mama is the authority for this—that some day she will be able to walk and run on two legs just as well as Trott himself. And this event may be looked for even before Trott has a mustache and long pants. A few days ago Lucette did not seem to have the least idea of what was expected of her. She was content with executing the most incoherent gambolings and with throwing herself about in all directions in a senseless way with such force that all Nounou's strength was needed to hold her in her extravagances. At the same time, little by little, she derived a keen pleasure from these exercises, and her movements seemed to develop a little more regularity. Yet one could not exactly say she was taking steps; there was some resemblance perhaps, and the idea that one day she would walk did not seem so fantastic. She could stand now, leaning against a chair. Sometimes she almost seemed about to start off. In his heart, Trott admitted that perhaps before long she would turn from a quadruped into a biped.

Another great event is in preparation. Papa and mama have had serious debates on the subject of Lucette's food. It seems that the day is approaching when Nounou will be called to other duties. At lunch and dinner they talk only of sterilized milk, of formulas of various gruels, etc. One cannot be too careful in choosing the nourishment that is to have the honor of competing with that furnished by Nounou. The doctor has been consulted. If they asked

Trott, he would have advised chocolate or else apple tart. There is nothing better. Perhaps chocolate would be preferable, because it takes lots of teeth for apple tart, and possibly Lucette hasn't quite enough. But they forgot to ask him. Yet, since he is smaller, he would know even better than mama and papa what children like. One must admit, however, that Lucette is easily pleased. In the depth of his soul Trott has always protested against her regimen. Often when she wasn't hungry or when she had a touch of colic or was cross, Trott would think that it wasn't surprising for her to be ill-humored when she was given the same food for every meal—and what food! It is really fortunate that mama and papa have at last decided to give their little girl something else.

Papa said the other day that it was a good thing to form good habits young. Well, then, since it's certain that little sister can't continue with that menu all her life, they ought to begin giving her something better at once. Strange that papa and mama should have waited a whole year to see a thing which Trott would have seen at the start. If it were anyone else, you would think that they didn't know what they were doing. But since it is they, it must be that they are right, and that it is Trott who doesn't understand, strange as that may seem.

Today is the date fixed for the great innovation. An imposing audience is assembled. Nounou is asked to retire. She throws the glance of a displaced rival at a stewpan heating

over a spirit lamp, and withdraws with an offended air. Mlle. Lucette seems unaware of the gravity of the occasion. She prances vigorously on Jane's knee and makes friendly overtures to papa, whose presence has been required. They may need his authority, it appears, but Trott doubts it. The gruel doesn't look very appetizing, to be sure, but compared to her previous repasts, it must be exquisite.

All is ready. Deeply concerned, mama approaches, the pan in one hand, a little spoon in the other. Jane seats Mlle. Lucette on her knees, tips her slightly back and arranges a little napkin under her chin. She suffers this without hostility. She is in one of her best moods. Papa places himself in sight, prepared to dominate the situation, and Trott is asked to captivate the attention of his little sister with the most diverting tricks he can imagine. He sets about acting the clown. This consists in rolling his head as though it were going to fall off and twisting his arms and body. For him this is the funniest thing in the world.

Then, with decision, mama chooses the instant to open fire. Spoon in hand, she extends her arm. All breathing stops. The moment is solemn. There is a religious silence. Even Trott is impressed with the gravity of the attempt and forgets to make faces. Suddenly all the mouths relax, the chests expand. It is over—it is done. Nounou is supplanted. Naturally. Trott knew it. You wouldn't have to be very smart to guess that!

To guess what? Something is going wrong. Mlle. Lucette

begins to squirm most disturbingly. Ah! She mustn't get angry! Mama and Jane join in a calming duet. . . .

"It must be too hot."

"Perhaps."

Papa gives a word of advice: "Be careful that the next spoonful is just right." Mlle. Lucette, mouth open, is listening to Jane, who is telling her stories.

Surreptitiously, with a well-timed movement, mama pours the second spoonful down her throat.

It doesn't seem to taste so very good, but Mlle. Lucette, taken unaware, has to swallow it or strangle. But plainly her gorge is rising. She is very red. Her arms wave violently. Her lips take on hostile folds.

"Amuse her, Trott."

Trott conscientiously goes through his repertoire. He throws himself into it, and distorts his whole face. Mlle. Lucette regards him coldly, with a look of disdain which unmistakably says, "Contort yourself as you please, I am not your dupe." And when mama tries to profit by a moment which she considers auspicious, Mlle. Lucette, with a rapid movement of the hand, sends the third spoonful of gruel splashing over papa and Jane.

Papa is vexed. He speaks gruffly. Intimidated for a moment, Mlle. Lucette does not completely oppose a new attempt. She allows the milk to be poured into her mouth but she does not swallow it. With unwearying patience and marvelous sang-froid, she begins to gargle.

Mama multiplies her entreaties and papa his threats without the slightest results. Ah! Look! She is shutting her mouth. She is making up her mind to swallow it. Alas! Two rivulets of milk begin to trickle from the two corners of her mouth on to her bib.

Mama is sometimes very patient, but not always. Now she begins to be really angry and to scold in earnest. Determined to intimidate the foe, once again, with an admirable show of courage, she inserts her instrument. But she has found her match. With one lusty puff Mlle. Lucette scatters a large part of the liquid among the spectators, and lets the rest drop down her windpipe.

Then follows a frightful scene. Fits of dreadful coughing shake her from head to foot; her face turns purple; her whole body twists as though she had been placed on an anvil. Jane tries vainly to hold her, mama pats her back, papa, beside himself, emits meaningless exhortations. Not satisfied with strangling on her milk, she is now strangling on anger and despair. Her throat really rattles, everyone talks, cries, runs hither and thither. The hubbub, tumult, clamor, are indescribable. Thunderstruck, Trott finds refuge in a corner, silent with fear. How is it all going to end?

Much time and fondling are necessary, many tender kisses, honeyed words, a whole dictionary of platitudes and endearments, to bring Mlle. Lucette back to normal. And even when she is there, it is easy to see that she is still out of sorts. Mama, who is truly very brave and fears nothing,

starts to dip the spoon into the milk again, but hardly has it left the pan and started on its way to Lucette's lips when that young lady grabs Jane by the ear with one hand and shakes her frantically, while with the other rammed down her own throat, she yells in agony.

Papa is a sailor. He knows that nothing can resist the unfettered elements. The wise man allows the tempest to pass, and returns to his task later. Therefore, with the voice of humiliation, he counsels retreat. Mlle. Lucette follows the fateful pan with her eyes until it has left the room. Clearly, defiance, complete defiance, possesses her. But lo! suddenly her eye lights up and a flood of gracious prattle pours from her lips.

Enormous, triumphant, serene in her power, Nounou has reappeared, and baby throws herself at her, anxious to find on her breast forgetfulness and consolation.

Meanwhile papa and mama remain abashed and silent. Trott is nonplused at his sister's stubbornness and disgusted with her bad taste. Apparently it is exceedingly difficult to teach little children to eat like grown-ups. Trott has a foreboding that tomorrow it may be the same thing, and the next day also. . . . Life is a very complicated affair.

Chapter 21

A WALK



JANE isn't feeling well today, so Trott is going to go walking all alone with Nounou and Mlle. Lucette. It is a flattering occasion. Nounou pushes Lucette's carriage and is completely occupied with her. She pays no attention whatever to Trott. Therefore he can do anything that enters his head without anyone trying to stop him. He can turn somersaults in the middle of the street or walk in the gutters or spit on the ground. Of course, Trott would never do any of these undignified tricks, but, physically, he *could* do them. The very idea is in itself a tremendous satisfaction. He will take Jip, who, since the reconciliation, will enjoy this beyond everything. The cortège, then, will be decidedly imposing. Trott, with Jip, will look almost as important as those big English maids who take out a collie on a leash beside a nurse pushing a baby carriage. Trott is greatly pleased at the picture. He feels he is someone. He gets all his things and lets himself be muffled up most docilely, then goes down into the garden where Lucette's little carriage is all ready,

awaiting its occupant. Jip would like to play and run, but Trott solemnly refuses. A young gentleman who is going to walk with a charming young lady cannot begin by running with his dog when he is already dressed to go out. Jip shows no offense. He starts running in crazy circles on the lawn in front of the house, and suddenly precipitates himself upon Puss who is promenading nonchalantly by. Puss spits and in one leap is on the windowsill, whence he contemplates his adversary with half-closed eyes.

At last the heroine appears in the arms of her Nounou. She is muffled up in a pretty white cloak. They have put on a veil because of the strong wind. Through it you cannot see just what she looks like, just what her expression is, but she seems to have lost her good humor. From time to time she utters little growls that presage disaster. Still, she allows herself to be put into her carriage without actual protest. Mama, on the threshold, tells Nounou to walk where there will be protection from the wind, so that baby will not take cold.

Trott suggests, "To the Valade Walk?"

Mama says, "If you like."

Trott is happy. To him the Valade Walk is something imposing, something that resembles a sanctuary, where one never goes without a certain solemnity. It is the place where the fashionable world goes. It is much more exciting, even more intimidating, than the beach.

Perhaps Marie de Milly will be there. What luck that

would be! Their cortège must really have quite an air: a pretty baby all in white in a beautiful carriage pushed by a colossal Nounou, much bigger than a man, on whose head nods a huge Alsatian bow like a butterfly on the verge of flight. Beside her, an elegant cane swinging from his hand (it is the hoop-stick Bertrand made from the branch of a tree), will be seen a young gentleman of the finest appearance, escorted by a magnificent black poodle. This picture fills Trott with satisfaction. He is certainly not vain, and he does not like at all to be on parade every day, but there are moments, modest though one may be, when the sensation of one's importance is not displeasing. Trott walks gravely, conscious of the solemnity of his rôle.

Mlle. Lucette, however, does not seem to be sufficiently conscious of hers. There is no use talking. She seems to have got off on the wrong foot today. Trott addresses her from time to time in his most amiable tone. He receives nothing but little growls in answer. She seems to be concentrating on the single idea of swallowing the veil that has been put over her face. She tries to snap at it and then, little by little, by sucking it in, to ingest it completely. A wet circle, constantly growing, appears in the neighborhood of her mouth. Trott tries to distract her attention from this pastime, which does not seem to him to be in the best of taste, but he fails completely. He turns to Nounou.

"Nounou, can't you stop Lucette from sucking her veil like that?"

Nounou stops the carriage, pulls the veil out of the little mouth that was engulfing it, and stretches it smooth. To show her displeasure, Mlle. Lucette increases her grumbling and throws herself from side to side in the carriage, eliciting a scream of terror from Nounou, who thinks she is about to topple over. Perceiving the success of this attempt, Lucette repeats the maneuver two or three times until she sees that no further attention is paid. Then she remains sulky, grumpy, and clearly cogitating evil.

In spite of everything, the Valade Walk is ultimately reached. There it is, under the green trees, a great throng of nounous, all bestreamered, each with her pink-and-white nursling. There also, sitting on the chairs or strolling along the paths, are many beautiful ladies, and gentlemen with shiny hair, who come and bow before them. It is an aristocratic place, where you do not go unless you are especially well dressed, where noisy games would be looked at askance.

Mlle. Lucette is not impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. She continues to lean sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, then tries to throw herself backward, growling. Trott is displeased. More appropriate behavior is in order. He tries very tactfully to slip over some good advice, but without the slightest success. Finally Nounou stops near a bench. She uproots Mlle. Lucette from her carriage and stands her on her feet, holding her under the shoulders. Ah, this is going to calm her! And, as a matter

of fact, for a moment everything goes along much better. Trott has even the satisfaction of hearing one pretty little lady say to another, "Just look at that love of a baby!" And both stop a moment and look at Lucette. This is as it should be. Jip has come to sit beside Trott, his tongue hanging out. Trott says to himself that they must form a most interesting looking group. He feels proud. What a pity that Marie de Milly has not come. He could show her his dog and his little sister. . . .

Perhaps this is not a favorable day for showing off little sister. She is irritable and impatient with Nounou because she will not let her crawl on the ground. There is a succession of little cries that become more and more strident. On a chair opposite, on the other side of the walk, an old gentleman who has been reading his newspaper lifts his head impatiently and moves to a farther chair. It is humiliating. Mlle. Lucette, however, is not humiliated. She grabs in all directions and from time to time seizes her veil in both fists, trying to tear it off. Nounou has much ado to manage her. Even her pretty bonnet is not spared. She has grabbed one pompon and pulled at it so vigorously that it bends over as if it had no strength left. She has also tried to pull out a handful of Jip's curls. But Jip moves out of reach and watches her jeeringly. Mlle. Lucette perceives the quality of this look. It irritates her tremendously. Her color becomes more vivid. She stamps with anger. Trouble seems to be in the wind.

At this moment a "Good morning, Trott," is heard. It is Marie de Milly. She is not timing her arrival well, but Trott makes the best of it. He introduces Jip and makes him give his paw. But Marie de Milly knows him already. It is little sister she wishes to see. It seems, however, that little sister does not wish to be seen. When Marie de Milly, such a pretty little girl, draws near, Lucette throws herself backward, behind Nounou's neck. Trott is very angry. Marie de Milly laughs. She launches a new attempt to make friends. Lucette begins to cry as hard as she can. Marie de Milly tries once more. Five pink scratches decorate her nose as a result. Then she says to Trott, "Your little sister is not a bit nice," and withdraws.

Trott follows her until she rejoins her nurse. He tries to make excuses for Lucette. Marie de Milly deigns to listen and tries to look convinced, but Trott feels that in spite of everything she has a very bad impression and he is sorely distressed. He says good-bye, then suddenly shudders and turns abruptly.

Nounou has put Mlle. Lucette back on her feet, thinking that that might calm her. But she is still far from being in a good humor. She cries out insults to the passersby, who happily cannot understand her. However, she stops short in her vociferations. What has happened? Under the bench she spies some orange peel. It is somewhat the worse for wear. But, such as it is, it is one of the most beautiful works of nature. By expressive pantomime Mlle. Lucette give orders

to Nounou to get it for her. Nounou replies in a suggestive tone, "Tirty, papy, tirty."

Mlle. Lucette is patient, at least up to a certain point. It is clear that her orders have not been understood. She reiterates them, therefore, in the most lucid manner. Nounou offers her her doll. Lucette sends it flying with one sweep of her hand. She has uncovered the deceitful darkness of the soul of her slave. And thus arose the series of shrieks that had caused Trott's shudders.

Motionless with distress, he surveys the revolting spectacle before him. Mlle. Lucette is struggling, uttering howls of anguish as if a red-hot iron were being plunged into her vitals. Various people have stopped. A lady murmurs, "Another wicked woman torturing a child!" A nurse says to a little girl, "Look at that baby! You are just as ugly as that when you are naughty." Other remarks, equally flattering, reach Trott's ears. He is entirely out of countenance. A desire for instant flight seizes him. No one would know then that he is the brother of that little pest. But this is impossible. You do not go walking alone. It isn't done and, besides, it would not be at all nice to abandon Nounou in her misfortune.

Heroic and resigned, Trott rejoins her and adds his efforts to hers to soften and sweeten Mlle. Lucette. Efforts lost! She continues to shout her throat sore. To top the affair, Jip, unnerved by all this noise, suddenly throws back his head and begins to bay the moon. There is nothing to be

added to the picture. Now everybody stops. A curious circle forms around them. An old gentleman laughs so hard that he chokes and becomes purple. Trott is humiliated to the depths of his soul. He feels himself dishonored. He wants to cry. Happily Nounou's calm sustains him. She smiles placidly through it all. She looks as if she found it quite natural. Indeed, she is one of God's chosen. Revived, Trott administers one or two good smacks to Jip. These relax Jip's nerves and he keeps quiet. At her end, Nounou decides to employ a center attack. She draws forth from the bottom of the carriage a bottle of milk. The sight of this at first elicits a still greater upheaval of rage from Mlle. Lucette, but these are the last convulsions. She resigns herself to drinking her bottle, though still stopping from time to time to grumble. The circle of onlookers disappears. Only one youngster, finger in nose, stays motionless, dreaming, but she is not worthy of Trott's attention. He feels his spirits rise somewhat, although he is most anxious to leave this scene which has witnessed his humiliation. So it is a real comfort to hear Nounou announce that the wind is decidedly too strong and that they must take Mlle. Lucette home, lest she catch cold.

They hurry. Once more reinstalled in her carriage, Mlle. Lucette seems somewhat better disposed. She has deigned to forget the orange peel. She looks about her with an air, if not actually amiable, at least indifferent. She seems absorbed in her own thoughts, hearing some inner voice. . . .

No luck! Here is Mme. Ray and an English lady. If only Nounou will have the good sense to pass by very quickly so that they will not be noticed! But no, Mme. Ray and her friend and Nounou and the carriage stop at the same time. Nounou is very proud to exhibit her nursling. The ladies go into ecstasies and pay her compliments. Mme. Ray tries to attract Lucette's attention. If only she will not get angry again! But she is very red and seems not even to suspect the presence of Mme. Ray in particular or of the outside world in general. She seems absorbed in some interior workings; her look seems turned inward. Trott is anxious. It would be so much better to go on. For Lucette not to have cried is luck enough. What can Nounou be waiting for? She is giving the inquiring ladies a lot of talk about the baby and mama, showing no signs of hurrying. Mlle. Lucette gets redder and redder. Finally Mme. Ray bends down to kiss her. Trott heaves a sigh of relief—prematurely. At the precise instant that Mme. Ray bends forward, a tiny noise is heard. Mme. Ray starts up quickly. Mlle. Lucette has regained her normal color.

Walking slowly, Trott is eaten by shame. It is too much for a single afternoon. And, besides, the wind is buffeting him so hard that he is almost thrown to the ground. Jip trots sidewise, his curls blown the wrong way. Nounou's Alsatian bow performs the most fantastic capers. All this harmonizes with Trott's thoughts. Oh, what an afternoon! His heart swells with bitterness. She is certainly not yet a

woman of the world, Mlle. Lucette. He throws her a furious look.

Mlle. Lucette is now in entire good humor. She contentedly watches gentlemen chasing their hats, the trees bending, and the leaves flying in wild capers. She approves all this and smiles charmingly at Trott who glares at her. Useless. Since nothing is annoying her any longer, why should she be in bad humor? She redoubles her wiles.

It is impossible to be angry with her. She is too little, and besides she is really very nice. By the time he has reached the door, Trott has forgiven her. Still when mama asks him if they have had a good walk, he answers in a decided tone:

"Pretty nice, thanks, but I don't think I want to go to the Valade Walk with Lucette again. She is still too little, you know."

Chapter 22

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF MLLE. LUCETTE AT THE AGE OF ONE YEAR



MLLE. LUCETTE is growing up. She has become quite a person. She is weaned now and eats gruel. She makes extended voyages across the floor on all fours, and she can also propel herself along the furniture, but less securely. She has eight teeth. She utters various syllables whose meaning is generally obscure and she also repeats endlessly and with evident enjoyment certain sounds which particularly please her and to which she attaches a precise meaning of her own. She has impetuous desires, regulated habits, simple reasoning, and tempestuous passions.

Trott and his little sister are on excellent terms. When she sees him approach she shows the joy she feels by gesticulating frantically. He is puffed up with pride when he hears mama explain to some visitor that Trott is Lucette's favorite. Together they play games which are at once very primi-

tive and very complicated, whose point escapes the grown people but which they two find highly absorbing. Trott needs only to make a gesture for Mlle. Lucette to imitate it and so, as mama says, he must be well behaved for two. This is very difficult, but Trott attempts it with good will and does not always go amiss. This does not mean that his influence on Mlle. Lucette is stable and regular. Each day the meaning of this young person's acts becomes more clear and they more apparently show themselves to be the consequences of understandable desires. But she still has whims, infatuations, and antipathies which plunge everybody and Trott in particular into stupefied astonishment. She has an exclusively subjective way of considering the universe which Trott finds particularly disconcerting, and sometimes, before such inconceivable self-will, he feels ill at ease and restless as he used to feel just after she was born, when she would change color in such an astounding way.

Who can explain, for instance, why Mlle. Lucette, when she is hungry and they bring her her gruel, deems it necessary to put herself into a rage before eating it, and then to swallow it askew with a resulting spasm of coughing which turns her scarlet and makes her eyes pop out of her head; after which she eats the rest most happily? This technique is practiced several times every day with invariable regularity. If there is anything dependable in Mlle. Lucette it is the tenacious persistence of her will. This unreasonable attitude vexes Trott to the utmost, but his sternest exhortations are

of no avail. He is equally unsuccessful when he tries to persuade Lucette to suck her crusts of bread sensibly; she infinitely prefers to begin by anointing the whole piece with saliva, after which she carefully rubs it on the floor and then begins to munch it contentedly, having first invited Trott to share it, in spite of the disgust which he plainly shows.

Dirt seems to exercise an especial attraction over Mlle. Lucette. The other day mama caught her just as she was about to thrust her head into the open slop jar where some of Nounou's combings were floating. She loves to stuff her hand into her mouth clear to the wrist and, after having moistened it, to plaster it carefully with everything she can find around her.

But above all there seems to be a particular joy in disdaining the use of a certain instrument of incontestable utility and in surrounding herself with products which in general are far from attractive. The relations of Mlle. Lucette and the above-mentioned instrument are exceedingly strained, and what is worse, invariably so. As soon as she sees it appear, her forehead wrinkles in firm resolution, and one sees that nothing except the failure of her physical resistance will induce her to give in. She begins by trying to intimidate her Nounou with formidable scoldings, accompanied by direct assaults on her nose and ears. Then, having been placed on the instrument in spite of her first line of defense, she uses all her strength to swing herself from right to left in this position. Eventually success crowns her efforts

and suddenly over she goes on one side with a loud thump. She is righted with severe warnings. She sees danger ahead in case of repetition, so, resolving that anything is better than to weaken, she sets about passing the time in the most agreeable manner possible under the circumstances. She strikes up various defiant tunes, and, perched on her instrument, she starts to tour the room by means of little jerks and, after she has perfected this lame man's gait, her speed is really amazing. This goes on for a quarter of an hour or so, sometimes even half an hour. In vain do mama and Nounou encourage her by means of the most laxative onomatopoetic sounds and the most tempting bribes; in vain do they strain their throats in deep-voiced threats. Mlle. Lucette remains serene. She refuses to be angry. She knows that the future is to the firm of will. She looks at her mother and nurse with peaceful and innocent eyes. Sometimes a smile of sympathy strays over her lips.

The outcome varies. It happens, though rarely, that the forces of nature betray the firmness of her heart. Then her face expresses the deepest discontent while they are pinning her up again, and, though showered with kisses and congratulations, she maintains the doleful look of a vanquished general, forced in spite of his courage to capitulate after a heroic resistance. But generally it is not she who capitulates. War-weary, at the end of breath and patience, mama and Nounou lift the siege. Then triumphant joy breaks over Mlle. Lucette's face. She melts into the tenderest endear-

ments toward the vanquished enemy, anxious to sweeten the bitterness of their defeat, and, softened, they murmur, "After all, perhaps the poor little thing doesn't need to." Rash words. After some minutes comes an instant of charmed silence. What can she be doing to make her sit so still? What is she doing? . . . Serious as after one of those victories which terrify even the conqueror, she listens to her inner urgings or surveys the scene of her crime with an interested and not unprideful look.

When he observes this power of resistance, Trott is filled with indignation not quite free from a trace of perverted admiration. Of course it is very wrong to resist mama and Nounou like that, but it's fine just the same. Perhaps even Miss, tough as she is, will have to give in to her. And, whether the battle has been lost or won, he can't help but feel a certain respect when he answers the frantic summons of the heroine. There is no denying that she is fond of Trott, but that doesn't keep her from showing toward him that independence of character and that wholly subjective attitude which are among her most marked traits. Sometimes, although he treats her with all the consideration which a man should show a young girl, Trott, seeing that she is reaching the age of reason, is tempted to think that she is awake, as he is, to the need of mutual concessions as a necessity of social living. Then he is suddenly brought back to reality by some disconcerting and unaccountable whim.

For instance, he is on the floor with her; he puts his head

close to hers and then suddenly draws it away. She reaches out her hand to caress him and laughs when he escapes. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he feels his nose grasped violently and ten sharp nails piercing his flesh; or else a well-aimed slap will sting his cheek, or a hungry finger will poke his eye with the firm intention, luckily thwarted, of extracting it because it shines so temptingly. All these acts mean that Trott's personality has no importance in the young lady's eyes. He is only a fragment of the scene in which she moves, a means of procuring certain enjoyments or certain sensations. She pets him when she needs to feel something soft, she scratches him when she wants to try her nails, she hits him when her muscles need exercise. And if Trott puts himself at a safe distance, her brows knit and her throat emits discordant sounds in order to show that she is irritated to see objects in her domain evade their natural function.

She has other still more curious instincts. Trott isn't very fond of his Sunday clothes—they demand too much of him—and, though he doesn't want to be dirty, he is sometimes very indifferent to certain details of his toilet which seem important to him only on very special occasions. Mlle. Lucette has quite other ideas about the splendors of style. When they put a clean dress on her, her face beams with serene pride and she glances to right and to left demanding admiration. When she happens to find a bit of ribbon or cloth on the floor or a forgotten duster, she adorns her-

self with it rapturously. Finally, when she sees herself in a glass, her gestures express complete satisfaction and she sends kisses to herself with a grace which she never uses for anyone else.

Though she is satisfied with herself, she is not equally indulgent toward others. And here again she displays the greatest vagaries. It appears, as far, that is, as shameless caprice can own to rules, that Mlle. Lucette's good will toward strangers is in inverse proportion to what they have every right to expect. Moreover, her esthetic sense is extraordinarily lacking in refinement. Mme. Mimer, who is so pretty and who adores children, has had nothing from her in return for the gentlest words but cross grumblings which turned into screams at the slightest attempt at a direct contact. Most of mama's friends receive the same welcome. On the other hand, at the sight of Mme. Merluron, the charwoman, who comes to the house once a week, she bursts into a frenzy of joy. It is also clear that she has a marked preference for gentlemen and she shows a lack of reserve which is positively bold. General Danquet, veteran of Coulmiers and conqueror of the Malagasies, could barely defend himself against the familiarity of her assaults. Whenever the postman passes she goes into real spasms of joy, sign of a shameless and, alas, unrequited passion. Bertrand, the gardener, condescends once in a while to respond to her fire, more burning, it must be admitted, than faithful. He allows her to pass her hands over his unshaven cheeks. This

preference humiliates Trott for, though he gives Bertrand credit for many fine qualities of soul, he cannot disguise the fact that Bertrand's approach disturbs several of our senses, the sense of smell in particular.

But Bertrand has been dethroned now for two days. And the usurper is someone to whom up to now Mlle. Lucette has been quite indifferent. It is papa. Their relations had been friendly but marked by good fellowship rather than passion. Now all is changed. And this is what brought it about. The other morning she was withstanding the usual siege. Intrenched in her position, she was braving the useless efforts of mama and Nounou, reinforced by the superfluous exhortations of Jane and Trott. Effort wasted. Suddenly, aware of her power, Mlle. Lucette judged the time ripe to take the offensive and launched a series of dreadful shrieks accompanied by indescribable stampings. Now it happened that papa had a headache and was in the midst of an important letter in an adjoining room. Instantly he appeared and with a rapid movement seized Mlle. Lucette from the midst of the aghast assembly and, accompanying his action with some energetic maritime expressions, he repeatedly placed his hand in contact with the seat of that young person.

The success of this act of authority was startling. I will not stress the promptitude with which the desired effect was obtained; that was a miracle, a shameful and complete capitulation. But, since that moment, Mlle. Lucette's heart had

opened wide to filial love. And since then, no sooner did she see her papa than she began to offer him her tenderest caresses, at the same time expressing by appropriate gestures that she had not failed in the duties whose necessity he had so clearly demonstrated.

If Trott had been a philosopher, he could have found herein an important lesson on which to meditate and from which to draw precepts on the manner of being pleasing to women. But Trott's soul is simple and straightforward. He was sorry for the victim although he recognized the justice of the punishment. He understood the birth of filial love in Lucette, and admired the generosity of her soul. And from this event he drew a new admiration for his papa, who by such simple means had obtained such diverse and marvelous results.

Chapter 23

A MORNING (DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS)



THE events which follow take place nearly every morning. It is not inappropriate, then, to report them in some detail.

Everyone is asleep. Not a footfall in the house. The closed shutters and the drawn curtains keep the bedroom in darkness; not utter darkness, but a transparent, attenuated darkness. At the top of the blinds is a little space whence filters a ray of daylight. Nounou's even snores beat through the room in a regular rhythm, and the little motes of sunlight dance to its measure on the ceiling. Nounou dreams of cows, of Bertrand, and stewed rabbit, her three passions. Mlle. Lucette, at her side, sleeps also.

Is she asleep? You cannot say no, for her eyelids are still closed and she is not crying. But she is very close to awakening. Her breathing is light and capricious; she is making significant little wriggles, and she is rubbing her eyes

with her fists. This stage does not last long. Her eyes open.

Mlle. Lucette surveys the dark. It is curious to wake up in the dark like that every morning. It is curious. Is it night still? No, not sleepy any more, and, besides, there is a little ray of sunlight coming through. Good morning, light. You can talk. Very well, then, let's talk. You jabber softly, with cries like a little bird who draws back, still too chilly to leave the warmth of the nest. A snoring answers. Nounou continues to dream. Bertrand is milking a cow; he is milking out rabbit sauce. . . . Nounou snores. . . .

Mlle. Lucette listens. What is it making that noise? Several ideas cross each other at the same moment in her little brain: "I'm hungry, I need to move, I don't like the dark." Nounou is asleep. What a shame! Gathering all her strength, Mlle. Lucette lets out two or three strident yells, tossing her legs wildly in the air.

Nounou's dreams become confused. Bertrand wants to make Nounou swallow the cow; the rabbit shrieks madly from its sauce. It is not the rabbit. It is Lucette. Mechanically, Nounou yawns out, shaking her bed as she does so, "Zleep, zleep!"

Oh, and do you think so? Go to sleep again? Only the sleep of the dead could resist the vocalizations of Mlle. Lucette. Nounou wakes completely. In her village she always got up at five o'clock. It is now nearly seven. Very hard to be awakened so early!

Seated in her bed, Mlle. Lucette triumphs, continuing

by gesture and by voice to stimulate her slave who is still wobbly from heavy sleep.

The customary rites are gone through. Shirts, shoes, diaper, are put on. The weather is not very fine today. Trott is taking his lesson. Lucette stays in the small parlor with mama until time for her bath. She has to be amused and given a chance to exercise. During the night there gathers in Lucette's limbs an energy that must be given outlet or it will occasion calamity. Mama has often said that her daughter is certainly an angel, but if there is any moment when she has a bit of deviltry in her, it is that which precedes her bath, that one when she is given into the sole charge of her mother, or rather, that moment when her mother is sole prey of her caprices.

At this time Mlle. Lucette is dominated by impulses that are disconcerting, numerous, and impetuous. First she starts running about the floor, to right and to left, as fast as possible, now here, now there. Bang! Down on her nose! It hurts! It might be well to cry. No, there is an entrancing bit of débris close at hand. Let's swallow it! It isn't very good, after all. Never mind!

"Lucette, show me this minute what you have put into your mouth!"

In spite of obstinate resistance, Mlle. Lucette is forced into a humiliating exhibition by her unfeeling mother, who despoils her ignominiously of her booty, a charming fragment of a leather sole.

Are they never going to let her alone! Must she always be annoyed and persecuted? There is only one thing to be done; go and give mama a good slap. To this end, Mlle. Lucette recommences her navigation of the floor. However, as she is making her way, she encounters an armchair, an armchair on which a book has been forgotten. After several attempts, she gets onto her feet and seizes it. It is forbidden to touch papa's books, but she cannot help it if she is swept away by her deepest longings. This book is adorable. It can be opened, shut, shaken. One page is torn out, now another.

"Lucette, what are you doing?"

Mlle. Lucette flees, the book pressed to her heart. But is it her own troubled conscience, the awkwardness of her muscles, or the treachery of the carpet? She falls full length.

"See there, you naughty girl! How papa will feel!"

Since she is being scolded, Mlle. Lucette considers it opportune to begin to whine and moan. "Hurt! hurt!" The scolding becomes a soothing. There is always that to be gained.

"There, go play with your own things, and let me finish my letter to Aunt Madeleine."

Mlle. Lucette putters for five minutes among her little plates, cups, and spoons. She throws them rapidly all over the room. From time to time mama has to get up because she throws part of her dishes under the furniture, and, nat-

urally, it is precisely those she needs. The tenth time mama, exhausted, declares:

"If you throw them under again, I'll not get up and get them."

Mlle. Lucette responds by a growl of defiance. If a grown person scratched her throat as Lucette is doing to produce this growl, she would have five minutes of terrific coughing. Mlle. Lucette practices this exercise gallantly, repeating it over and over.

"Will you be quiet, young lady!"

Lucette looks at her mother, becomes quiet, and astutely throws a tea-pot under the couch. Then she begins to weep, accompanying her tears with desperate pantomime, but mama is inexorable. She might very well have tried to get really angry. However, this might be dangerous, and, besides, the desire is not so very strong. After having achieved the dispersal of her kitchen utensils, Lucette begins a search for some new distraction. She tries walking and then throwing herself down, hoping that this will make mama look up. Then, seeing that this does not succeed, she begins to creep on all fours. This trick has the advantage of polishing the floor and dusting the rug with the clean dress she has just put on. She has plenty of others. On the lower shelf of a little stand, Mlle. Lucette notices her mama's work-basket. Her heart thumps with happiness. She seats herself comfortably on the floor before the basket and pulls out scissors, ribbons, and bits of cloth. Then she opens papers

of needles and pins. She empties button boxes, unwinds spools of thread and rolls of tape. Is it possible that so many treasures can be united in one single place anywhere on earth! All of a sudden, mama, uneasy at the silence and with a presentiment of some cataclysm, turns around. She utters a cry of horror at seeing Mlle. Lucette surrounded by the contents of her sewing-basket.

The floor looks like a battle-field. This is too much! Mama is upset. She administers a slap to each of the hands of her daughter and puts her in a corner.

“Stay there, young lady, till you can be good.”

Mlle. Lucette bursts into lamentations that vary from a plaintive whine to yells. Life seems to be painted in every shade of black. She is always the victim of injustice and brutality. She will have to scratch mama, tear her dress, pull her hair. She screams the most violent insults at her, the most dreadful threats, but it is all incomprehensible. Everything is horrid. Nounou is a tiny bit nicer than the others, but she is a pest too. Humanity is detestable, even Trott. Sewing articles alone are interesting, and of these she is mercilessly deprived.

Finally Mlle. Lucette tires of pouting in her corner and so begins to creep sadly about on all fours. Perhaps, with luck, she will find some forgotten scrap, a piece of wood, something or other that she can put into her mouth. Nothing. So, disgusted with this attempt at adventure, she starts to stand up. She happens to be beside the little table. For sup-

port she grasps the tablecover, which is hanging down over the edge, and pulling at it, she loses her balance and sits down with a yell, amid an avalanche of vases, photograph albums, porcelain figurines, and ornaments of all sorts.

Torn from her letter, mama utters another piercing cry and falls upon the culprit. First she makes sure that her daughter has not suffered any serious wound; then, reassured, she brokenheartedly commences to pick up the bits of her shattered treasures, sternly admonishing Mlle. Lucette all the while. Lucette shows no concern. Consoled for her bump, she follows mama's movements with interest and gives her a lot of unintelligible advice. Finally the door opens. Mama gives a little "Ah" of relief. It is Nounou.

"Come, papy, for your path."

Mlle. Lucette understands this language very well. In order to facilitate Nounou's task, she begins by hiding under the armchair, then under the table, then off she runs as fast as she can. She is caught by the seat of her diaper, lifted up by main force, and carried off. This is the moment to make a good defense. Accordingly, she dispenses lively whacks and scratches. It is not that she dislikes taking a bath, but merely that, as a preliminary, it feels good to relax one's nerves.

All the while that Nounou is undressing her, she throws herself into the most unbelievable contortions, pushing to her knees unexpectedly to try to seize the sponge, the

powder box, the towels. These attempts yield no results; however, she succeeds in spilling the bottle of toilet water and smashing the jar of vaseline. There is always something. You must realize that these various exercises are in no way a sign of ill humor. They are agreeably accompanied by affectionate conversation and happy warblings. Today, however, Mlle. Lucette inaugurates a series of exercises looking to the perfecting of the ability to swallow the soap. Nounou nips this attempt in the bud. No luck. Finally there she is, undressed! Mama is ready. The bath is ready. Then Mlle. Lucette, who, up to this point, has refused obstinately to perform a certain important duty, judges this the opportunity to show by infallible signs that she is ready to attend to her responsibilities, so, with a sigh of exhaustion, mama seats her, well wrapped up, on her little chair and waits patiently.

Mlle. Lucette lets her gaze wander about her with the air of a conqueror. She is conscious of her power. There is no need of hurry. She is proud of the results of her activity. Undoubtedly, she tells herself how little these masses of humanity avail against her. . . . Finally, after she has taken all the time she wishes, she announces she is satisfied. Speedily seized, she is lowered into the water.

In the beginning, she utters a few sharp cries, although the feel of the lukewarm water is pleasant. Then various pastimes follow, one after the other. It is a very nice trick, while mama is washing your face, and therefore is defense-

less, to give two or three smart kicks, so as to splash water all over the room. In a burst of misplaced tenderness, you try to pat mama's face. The moment for this is when she is soaping your back. You give a sudden wriggle so that the soap goes down to the bottom of the tub. Sponges are particularly alluring. The face sponge is charming, but unhappily almost unattainable. Mama makes it pass by so quickly that you see it only in snatches, like a delightful meteor. But the other, the body one, is more accessible. Sometimes they let it float in the bath. It is possible, then, to throw yourself suddenly upon it, to grab it in both fists and take in several mouthfuls of soapy water. It is exquisite. With what you succeeded in swallowing previously, this helps give you strength to wait for the soup to come.

The bath is over too soon and the soup comes too slowly; the interval between is filled by the most unpleasant activities. It is one of those moments in the day's work when Mlle. Lucette curses most profoundly the exigencies of civilized life. Nature has bestowed upon the human face a certain number of orifices: nostrils, mouth, ear-holes, which in themselves are most intriguing places to dig with fingers or other tiny objects. By some barbaric reasoning, mama thinks this is the moment to clean them in a very thorough manner. It may be she really has reasons; at any rate, she is most positive about them.

A veritable battle ensues. Generally she emerges victorious, but the victory is dearly bought. Mlle. Lucette defends

her position with her uttermost energy, and a fresh battle must be fought to conquer each orifice. Feet, hands, and voice unite in the bloody duel. Finally she succumbs, but mama has gained only a Pyrrhic victory. She is exhausted, breathless.

Mlle. Lucette is pink, serene, and radiant. The cleaning-up accomplished, she has energy enough left to complicate the matter of getting dressed. She jerks and bounds while they are fastening her underwaist; she kicks any available shin while her diaper is being adjusted; when it is time to put arms in sleeves, she solicitously spreads her fingers as wide as she can so as to make the operation impossible unless they want to break something. A thousand other inventions offer proof of her inventive spirit and of the abundance of her vitality.

The powerful placidity of Nounou and the nervous energy of mama end by triumphing over all resistance. Mlle. Lucette is dressed. She is enchanted and looks at herself with a satisfied air. She is very happy that everything is over, the more so that all this labor has aroused in her a need of both nourishment and sleep.

Nounou goes to prepare the soup. Mlle. Lucette utilizes the moments remaining to her to wipe her face with her soiled lingerie and to grab several small toilet articles that chance to be forgotten. The other day she succeeded in sending the soap, the comb, and the brush swimming in the tub. A beautiful triumph!

Finally Nounou arrives with the bowl. Mlle. Lucette becomes absorbed as usual.

"Now, sleep!" says mama.

Mlle. Lucette is drooping with sleepiness, but tradition demands that she resist. She utters two or three growls. Mama repeats firmly, "Sleep."

Lucette scrutinizes her once more as a boxer scrutinizes the face of his adversary. She would dearly like to resume the offensive, but she is clearly in a state of inferiority. One eye closes, then the other. She squeezes out one last protest. Mama hears her and pulls the curtains. She is asleep.

Nounou moves heavily about the room, putting it in order. Her clumsy steps rock Mlle. Lucette without waking her. And mama slips out with a feeling of deliverance, eager for her couch and for a well-deserved rest, thinking luxuriously that there will be a truce until tomorrow morning.

Chapter 24

PAGES OF HISTORY



It is not easy to portray with precision Mlle. Lucette's state of mind. Only copious dissertations with abundant commentary and explanatory notes could adequately describe in detail her impressions, the mobility of her acts, the subtleties of her reasoning. So, to deepen the acquaintance we wish our readers to have with this young person, we must content ourselves with transcribing in brief the results of various observations and with stressing certain peculiar habits whose exact character and significance the gentle reader must endeavor to appreciate for himself. It is thus that sometimes chronicles limiting themselves to simple personal reflections have succeeded in transmitting the sayings of wise men, the achievements of conquerors, and the sufferings of the people, things both too simple and too complex to survive the flood of erudition of an ordinary pedant.



Mlle. Lucette does not yet clearly differentiate between the living creatures and the inanimate objects which surround her. This is natural since she does not yet talk. But if she talked and if she could use words which in reality she has no idea of, this, I imagine, would be what a leaf from the note-book of her thoughts would show.

Bertrand.—A love. Cupid. Eros. He is beautiful as a lump of sugar, beautiful as a scrap of silk. He is the ideal realized on earth, but too often out of reach.

Certain object (a).—One sits on it regularly every morning and a certain number of times during the day. It is a very particular kind of chair. Unnecessary to dwell upon its importance, physiologically speaking. From the moral point of view, wakens diverse ideas. Often suggests a disagreeable summons. At other times recalls duty valiantly performed.

Diapers.—Infinitely preferable to the above for the same service. In incomprehensible aberration, mama and Nounou turn them from their proper purpose. It is hard to struggle against inveterate prejudice, but one struggles.

Hands.—Slap-containers which function automatically almost without one's volition and which distribute their contents to right and to left.

Jip.—Disconcerting creature. A little superior to Nounou and mama. Less docile. Barks dreadfully and runs away sometimes when you want to pull his hair.

Mama.—Accessory, on the whole very sympathetic and very precious. Needs to be held on a tight rein because easily becomes demanding and develops illusions as to her independence. Needs some consideration. Affection and prudence both counsel it.

Matches.—You don't find them often enough. They have a fascinating little red tip. See *pins*.

Nounou.—A fallen creature. Reduced from the noblest nutritive functions to the most vulgar hygienic service. Inferior being with whom one can take any liberty such as slapping or scratching her, pulling her ears, grabbing her hair, etc. Withal this does not prevent a solid friendship.

Papa.—Synonym for respect, something awe-inspiring. You mustn't cry when he's around if there is no better reason than a little itching of the throat or the tongue. It is a good idea to show him some marks of amity, even when not dictated by a real need of being expansive. Also prudent to heed his injunctions when formulated in a certain manner.

Pins.—One of the most charming products of the floor. Frequently found in the regions sown by Nounou. Mama handles them very awkwardly, sticking you with them. Mlle. Lucette is more skillful. It is wise to pretend you haven't any, if you want to suck them at your ease. But that is wicked; wherefore great moral anguish.

Puss.—Something sacred. Half way between *papa* and *stove* (which see). You can't be familiar with him. After Lucette, the being most worthy of respect in creation. Good

to flatter him. One can make signs of adulation to him from afar. If only you could catch his tail and his whiskers! But that's impossible.

Sleep.—Excellent on the whole. But one is bound to coquette with it a bit. One must defend one's self as long as possible and abandon one's self to it only when at the end of one's strength.

Stove.—Awakens ideas similar to *papa* (which see). Fearful veneration: it burns.

Table.—Charming and perfidious object. Carries the most marvelous treasures. But you receive a tap on the hand when you touch it. Has very hard corners. You are made aware of this fifteen or twenty times a day. But it's no use hitting it back when it thumps you. Not to be trusted, but one forgets.

Tongue.—A tool infinitely useful. Serves as complement of eyes and hands in getting acquainted with the outside world. To have any exact idea of an object the tongue should first rub over it entirely. But it is wise to do this surreptitiously because of mama's habitual stubbornness.

Trott.—Very interesting. He is made to amuse you just as milk is made for drinking and crib for sleeping. Less clumsy in appearance than the majority of human beings. Sometimes is forgetful of his duties and much too independent.

Visits.—I. *Ladies*. By far the most disagreeable part of human society. Familiar, invading, noisy,

lacking in reserve, kissing. They seize you suddenly and shake you. Good to keep them at a distance and to begin scolding when they approach, to make them understand you can barely tolerate them. A few exceptions.

- II. *Gentlemen*. By far the nicest part of human society. Reserved, polite, sometimes almost too cold, a little timid. You must put them at their ease. Only one serious criticism; sometimes their voices are too heavy and they dress too often in black. But it is fun to be afraid of some of them.

Etc.



It is difficult to write history. Three witnesses of the same event will give you entirely different accounts. If these three witnesses are Nounou, Trott, and Lucette, these differences become prodigious. So it is not strange that once in a while conflicts break out between them because of a lack of analogy in their conceptions of life and of things.

Example:

I. *Nounou's Version*.—It is afternoon; the children are playing quietly together. Nounou is profiting by the calm to write to her mother. She is laying bare the sufferings of her heart. Here the pigs are not so fine as at home, but the men are darker. Everyone here speaks French with a funny accent. No one eats sauerkraut. Nounou is thinner. She

weighs only a hundred and eighty-two pounds. Her employers plague her. She has to wash her feet every week, which is unhealthy. The gardener is in love with her, but she cannot forget her Hans. It rarely rains and it is not cold enough. The women don't wear bonnets. . . . Nounou is halted in her flow of ideas. After a couple of stupefied moments she realizes that it is because the children are shrieking unmercifully. Mlle. Lucette, after being good for at least ten minutes, became angry because Trott would not give in to her, so she threw some pieces of wood at his head. At this, M. Trott gave her a smart rap on the hand. Then she began to yell. It takes some time to console her. Nounou sighs and abandons her letter.

II. Trott's Version.—Trott has been entrusted with a great task. Mme. Bluebeard and her two brothers, after the sad end of M. Bluebeard, have asked Trott to build them a new castle because the old one brings back such gloomy memories. Trott feels honored at the mark of confidence and immediately sets to work. He is transformed into an architect of the time of the fairies. The pieces of wood with which he is building are of the most rare and precious material. A shining palace begins to rise. The two brothers have already come to congratulate him and to present him with a superb necklace of precious stones, and Mme. Bluebeard has graciously extended her hand for him to kiss. Trott brings new ardor to his work. But now comes a strange genie in the form of Mlle. Lucette. Her hands are full of

new material which she is bringing to the good architect. The architect receives them with gratitude. The palace grows in size and beauty. But suddenly the genie is seized with destructive rage. She is sent by the late Bluebeard to destroy the work of the fairy architect. With tears in her eyes, Mme. Bluebeard begs Trott to save the palace. Trott promises. Many times he drives off the aggressor. At last all is ready; it is all done but to put on the roof. Mme. Bluebeard and her two brothers visit the house. Trott bends his head to the ground to receive them. At the same instant, through a traitorous impulse of the wicked genie, the whole palace hits him on the head, engulfing Mme. Bluebeard and her brothers in its débris. Trott is outraged, and besides he has a bump. He gives Lucette a good little rap on the hand. She thoroughly deserves it.

III. Version of Mlle. Lucette.—The most hateful vices in the world are concentrated in the heart of Trott. He is a deceitful and false brother. Mlle. Lucette had commanded him to amuse her. She wanted to trot about the room hanging on to his blouse, but, out of regard for him, she resigned herself to accepting his game instead. He was to build her a big tower with blocks; then she would knock it down. That's what you do with dominoes. So she had consented and, very graciously, had brought him the necessary material without even demanding to put it in place herself. She had humored him too much. After a while the tower was high enough. Then Mlle. Lucette wanted to knock it down. In

fun, Trott had pretended to prevent her. A good idea! It let you run and cry. But the best entertainment can be spoiled if too long continued, a fact which Trott doesn't understand. Mlle. Lucette decided to show him. So, while he was kneeling on the ground, she brought the tower about his head. Mlle. Lucette was proud as could be. It would be hard to imagine a pleasanter farce or one in better taste, now wouldn't it? Well! No sooner was he up than Trott threw himself upon Mlle. Lucette and hit her. Not very hard, to be honest, but a slap is a slap. How atrocious! How traitorous! You can only shriek and shriek! . . .



In the garden. A white baby and a pink one. The mothers watch them and talk. The white baby is looking at the pink one. The pink baby is defiantly staring at the white baby and, in his anxiety, has dropped his shovel. The white baby, comfortably seated on the ground, is examining the pink baby severely, her brows knit. The examination is favorable. The white baby smiles, then frowns again, grunts and smiles again. The pink baby is intimidated and seeks refuge near its mother, whimpering, "Mama, mama." Then the white baby opens her campaign and advances towards the pink baby, who whispers, "Is 'fraid, is 'fraid." The white baby makes all sorts of friendly faces, lifts her skirts, bends as though to bow, babbles two or three syllables, and finally strokes the cheeks of the terrified pink baby with her two hands. At last, rising on tiptoe, the white baby

presses her lips on the other's cheek. The mothers murmur tenderly. The pink baby looks astonished. His mother, humiliated, urges him on and lectures him. The pink baby, emboldened, follows the white one, imitating each one of her motions. Then he wants to kiss her also. The white baby grunts fiercely. The pink baby stops, reflects a moment, then goes at it again. The white baby laughs and runs away. The pink baby runs after her, laughing and shrieking, gay and confident. The white baby turns, grunts again, and gives him a resounding slap. The pink baby is stupefied. He stands motionless for a moment, hesitating and thoughtful, then goes back to his mother. They give him a cracker and he starts to munch it contentedly. The white baby comes up and tries to take it away. The pink baby willingly gives up the larger share, keeping only a little piece. The white baby looks at the big piece she has achieved, throws it on the ground, and roughly grabs the tiny scrap which the pink baby has kept. The pink baby is twice as big as the white one; he allows this insult, but shows consternation. After a moment he stoops to pick up the discarded piece. The white baby knits her forehead and gives a strident cry. The pink baby draws back. The white baby's smile betrays a sense of power as she crumbles the pink baby's cracker. The pink baby makes no attempt to retrieve it; with a heavy heart and an empty stomach, he seeks comfort with his mother. She thinks, "What a booby he is!" The other mother scolds the white baby, but she thinks, "She is adora-

ble." The pink baby is called Jacques; he is going to be a big boy. The white baby is called Lucette; she is almost a little woman already.



Puss is curled up in the sunshine, asleep. He sleeps voluptuously. Alluring dreams crowd under his closed eyelids. He sees heaps of agonizing mice displayed before him, little birds skewered to his taste, fried fish, liver and lights, milk. He sleeps and, sybarite that he is, he purrs in his sleep. He has no suspicion of what impends.

Mlle. Lucette peers at Puss with a greedy eye. She is forbidden to touch him. He goes "scratch-scratch" when you touch him. That's what they say, but is it true? An imp whispers skepticism into Mlle. Lucette's ear; he seems so gentle, so silky! He has so many pretty little hairs which it would be such fun to touch, to pat, to pull just a little! The temptation is too strong. Nounou is not looking. It is irresistible.

Trembling with hope, Mlle. Lucette approaches with little furtive steps. Puss is asleep, he does not stir. How nice he looks; he seems to be laughing with his mouth open. Surely they have slandered him. He has nice little stiff hairs close to his nose. He wouldn't hurt a soul. You could treat him any way you wanted; still, you'd better handle him gingerly. But those little hairs are so funny! Oh! you simply have to touch one, just one, just barely touch it to see how it feels. Delicately, with little pinching fingers, Mlle. Lu-

cette grasps the white mustache. Then events succeed each other so rapidly that pen cannot follow them. Something spits, scratches, leaps and flees. . . . In amazement Mlle. Lucette looks at her hand, marked with three red streaks—the blood forms in drops; it falls. Then she breaks into sobs.

She has added a new idea of hurt to her list. She was already acquainted with the kind that comes from within; when you have that kind you are cared for and comforted. She knew, too, the kind you feel when you are punished for having done something wrong; that is legitimate and beneficial. That makes a lot of different hurts. But now there is another kind which wicked creatures give you when you haven't meant to bother them at all.

Lucette weeps over her scratch. Perhaps, very obscurely, and, alas, with other motives also, she is crying because she has discovered evil.



Mlle. Lucette is looking at her picture book. In it she finds intense, profound, repeated impressions which change and grow each day. At first she was struck only with the succession of diverse colors and even this was a great joy. The pages followed each other like the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope. Mlle. Lucette played this instrument by herself and her Nounou played symphonies of color for her which gave her a glimpse of beauty. Little by little the character of these symphonies changed. Besides the mere appearance of color, she began to notice the surface and size

of the colored patches. There were tiny spots of color and then there were large ones. The former could charm you with their delicacy, while the latter could fill you with enthusiasm. Later she became sensitive to form. There were some shapes which pleased the eye and others which made her frown. Personal judgment here played a larger part. Finally she had grasped the symbolic significance of the pictures in her book. Now, in the symphony of color that struck her eye, she had learned that certain signs had an interpretative value, that you could find in them the picture of a baby, of a horse, of a house. Then she felt a still more intimate tenderness for her book, because it became for her the book of her human acquaintanceship, the book which contained all the mysteries of science with their explanations. Perhaps it had lost in true esthetic value, but its utilitarian, educational, and scientific value had increased enormously. Mlle. Lucette now looks at her picture book with all the force of her intelligence, as a mathematician scrutinizes his problems, as a poet models his sonnet. She sees before her all the unknown diminishing day by day, and her thirst for learning is unbounded. And so, when engaged in this work, she becomes red and excited; after a few minutes she begins to laugh overmuch or to fret, and her attention strays. Then mama prudently takes away the book. Overstrain must be avoided.



Mlle. Lucette roams the world in search of adventure.

She inspects the furniture and the carpet, for she has had enough of her rubber animals and boresome toys. She is thirsty for the unknown, the unheralded, perhaps for the prohibited, and she gives voice in an undertone to her confused hopes and incomprehensible desires. Suddenly her eyes open wide; there on the floor lie mama's scissors, these forbidden, fascinating, tempting scissors. The forbidden fruit! The fabulous golden fleece! The scissors! Mama is reading, off her guard. Mlle. Lucette makes a bargain with herself. She will do the forbidden thing and touch the scissors, and then later on they will give her a little whipping. She approaches it, seats herself, touches it, pokes it, admires it. She handles it prudently because she knows that it pricks. It is delightful. She amuses herself royally. But little by little the amusement palls. Two disagreeable feelings weigh upon her; first there is the monotony of spending so much time at one thing, and then she has done wrong and should receive a slap. Now she is having to wait for the slap. In vain she signals her mother. Mama pays no attention to her wrong-doing. It ceases to be interesting. She must make mama understand what is happening. Deserting her scissors, Mlle. Lucette goes to her mama and tries to explain to her. Wasted effort! Mama only murmurs absently, "All right, be quiet. Nounou is coming." Distress floods Mlle. Lucette's soul. To begin with, she has done wrong and her embryo of a conscience is suffering; then she has not received the slap that is due her,

and that upsets her ideas of justice; moreover, the slap is absolution as well as punishment. And so Mlle. Lucette feels unhappy and very guilty. She wails and wails, stung with remorse. Not only has she sinned, but they have refused her her rightful punishment. There is no danger of her touching the scissors again.



Her mouth half open, Mlle. Lucette looks at Trott aghast. A little while ago he slipped while sliding and had a fall. He has a big black and blue mark on his forehead. He didn't want to cry but you can't always do what you want. Huddled in a corner, he cries and sobs and wipes his eyes and finds no comfort in Nounou's indifferent words. Ah! if mama were only there!

Lucette looks at Trott. So big people cry too? Do they feel things too, do they have their own existences and hurts just as she does? This idea plunges Mlle. Lucette into a depth of meditation. But such conclusions seem too impossible to be adopted; there is no one but herself who has the right to cry and scream. Whoever beside herself cries and screams is acting wrongly, is stepping out of his part and intruding on her rightful domain, and in so doing is playing a sort of disrespectful comedy. If Trott is crying, it must be because he is making fun of her and trying to hurt her feelings through his own outrageous egotism. She will not be his dupe. Trott deserves to be taught what is what. She undertakes to do it.

She approaches Trott and, seeing her coming through the mist of tears, he is touched at her wishing to comfort him. With all the force of her little arm, she hits him a stinging blow.



After lunch they always throw the left-over crumbs of bread onto the balcony. Soon, from all corners of the garden, come flying the little birds, perching on the balcony, and knock, knock, go their hard little bills as they peck briskly at the balcony with dry, quick taps. Perched on mama's lap, Mlle. Lucette watches them ecstatically. For two whole seconds she doesn't budge while she softly murmurs endearing syllables. You mustn't make a noise or they'll go away. How hard it is to restrain your voice, your arms, your legs! Mlle. Lucette wriggles so that mama has to let her slide down.

"Don't go near."

Of course she won't go near. From a distance Mlle. Lucette pirouettes in one spot and calls to the little birds. She is explaining to them how pure her intentions are. How cunning they look! She simply must see them closer and touch them if she can. Mlle. Lucette breaks loose. She throws herself toward the floor and grabs with all her might. The little birds fly off in terror. There she sits, surprised and abashed, calling to them and scolding. They won't come back, they are gone. Yesterday it was the same way. It will be the same tomorrow. How could Mlle. Lucette pos-

sibly imagine that the little birds would be afraid of her!



Mlle. Lucette is playing with her doll. Long ago she has pulled out every single hair and put out its eyes. But this does not hinder true affection. She rocks it gently in her arms, its head down and its feet held against her heart. She murmurs gentle counsels and declarations of love. Her gestures, usually as quick and abrupt as a jumping-jack's, become gentle and tender as the caresses of a little mother.

But here comes mama back from some visits. Mlle. Lucette drops the doll and rushes. She overwhelms mama with passionate exclamations, holds to her skirts, cries, jumps, and dances, gives mama no rest till she sits down and takes her on her knees. It is an explosion of joy, a flood of affection, glowing and disarming.

Suddenly Mlle. Lucette stops motionless. Her eyes are fixed on an object. Blind and bald, the doll sprawls lamentably on its nose. Lucette sees it and, after hesitating a second, climbs down from her mother's knee and makes a dive at it. She picks up the doll by one foot and babbles a thousand consolations into its ear, kissing its back, its stomach and its discolored cheeks indiscriminately. Then she returns quickly to her mama and offers her the shapeless rag with a gesture as of prayer. You don't want anyone to be jealous. Small and great, all are in need of kisses and tenderness and love.

Chapter 25

UNHAPPY HOURS



ORDINARILY, when Trott awakens in the morning, he does not awaken all at once. There comes first a sort of lethargy, very short and sweet, during which he is deliciously befogged. It feels so good you would almost like to stay in this state forever. And it is doubly appreciated because you know it never lasts more than an instant and also because this light fog is veiling a lot of pleasant things that are emerging from a soft farawayness that little by little grows more distinct. You are running over with joy even before your eyes are open. Then there will be breakfast—what silly thing will Lucette think up to do today?—there is a new plaything—there will be an extra good dessert at noon—perhaps there will be a drive this afternoon. It is as if a series of glittering lighthouses came to dissipate the morning fogs, and, all of a sudden, there you are in full daylight, with a brightness through which shines such a smiling perspective that it seems to you that one day will never be long

enough for it all. Then, waked up for good, you jump from your bed and hasten to get dressed, impatient to have a go at life again.

But this morning when Trott awakened, things did not go as usual. Before he had his eyes open, he felt his heart weighed down by something heavy and black, and he would have liked to go back to sleep for a long time, perhaps for always, in order not to know what it was. Trott is not yet familiar with lugubrious awakenings, and he is afraid of the sad things he will be aware of as soon as he has lifted his lids. But he cannot go back to sleep. He wakes. He grows wider and wider awake. He has to open his eyes, look at things and remember. It is an ugly gray day which harmonizes with his thoughts. The wind hurls great gobs of rain against the panes. It whistles dolefully in the distance and suddenly howls as it turns into a squall. It is certainly not a gay morning, but Trott would have paid no attention to it if there were not something else the matter.

For several days past there has been much less laughter in the house. Mama, who is always so lively, has been silent for long stretches, and papa, who is always good and kind, has been more affectionate than ever, and has looked at you sometimes with eyes that seemed to be dreaming. Naturally, Trott had not noticed all of this at the time, but he recalled it after what papa told him yesterday.

They were taking after-dinner coffee, and Trott, perched on his father's knee, had just finished sucking a lump of

sugar soaked in coffee. He was laughing because papa gave his knee a jolt and tried to unseat him, but he clamped himself down tight and his father said, "You cling like a little monkey." Trott felt much elated and began asking questions about monkeys. Papa gave him some very curious information. Then Trott declared he would love to have one, and papa answered, "I will bring you one when I come back, if your mama is willing."

"When I come back!" Is papa going away again?

Papa tried to joke but he did not seem to feel much like it.

"Yes indeed, old chap, I'm due to take a little trip. When you are a sailor, you have to be on the water some of the time."

Trott did not understand just what he meant at first. Papa goes away sometimes for a few days and then comes back. You know he is not far away and that, if there should be need of him, he will be there directly. You feel protected and reassured even if he is not in the house. Trott thought at first that papa was going on a trip like that. But it seems this is different. Monkeys live in a country that is very far away. And papa will have to stay away so long that it is almost impossible to imagine it: longer than since Lucette made her appearance in this world. And it seems as if she has always been here.

Trott feels himself growing more and more downcast as the afternoon lengthens. Is it really true? Is it possible? Now that mama knows that Trott has been told, she does

not hide her feelings so carefully. She lets her little boy see that her eyes are very queer. He feels all bruised. It seems as if the house is full of something black.

Mlle. Lucette is the only one who remains completely indifferent in the midst of the general gloom. She trots serenely here and there, babbles all sorts of complicated things to the bits of paper she adores tearing, goes from one big person to the other with tokens of affection, dances all by herself with the awkward grace of a young bear and then seeks compliments and applause, entirely unaware of the sadness around her.

It is clear that the separation, though she could conceive it as coming the very next moment, affects her very slightly. What is the use of being sad because papa is going away, when so many other well-known faces are left? After his departure, when someone asks her where he is, she will raise her arms in a sweeping gesture, "All dawn!" and that will mean, "It is a cut and dried affair. There is nothing I can do about it. Let us talk about something else."

When she came to ask Trott to play with her, he tried to explain to her the great misfortune that was hanging over them. She had listened most attentively, had offered several rather unintelligible remarks, together with little gestures of sympathy, then clearly annoyed at the gravity of her interlocutor, she had made faces at him, burst into peals of laughter, and finally had been so funny that, instead of sharing Trott's sorrow, she ended by making him forget it.

While he was kneeling on the floor, burdened with the responsibility of Lucette's rubber animals, he suddenly remembered that his poor papa was going away in two days. He blushed at his own lack of feeling and for a moment was angry at Mlle. Lucette, who, not content with showing her own revolting lack of sentiment, had succeeded in perverting the heart of another. But you cannot be seriously angry with her. She is too little. She doesn't understand that in two days the house will be empty, since papa won't be there, since he will be traveling way far off, on a boat which is very big when you see it close to shore, but which will seem like a tiny bird, like a bit of rag, like a dot, like a nothing, when it is alone in the middle of the great murmuring ocean.

And in the evening, before he can fall asleep, Trott listens to the long-drawn wail of the rising wind and the confused rustling of the complaining sea. He feels himself oppressed by the sea, by the night, and by his painful thoughts. He remembers gruesome pictures he has seen, where men cling to wrecks and are crushed by monstrous waves. He reassures himself a little by thinking that papa is so strong and so skillful that no harm can come to him. But the anguish is too poignant; sleep flees and he stays awake a long time, watching the fearful shadows on the wall.

All of a sudden the bedroom door opens. Papa and mama always come to kiss him before they go to bed. Sometimes he remembers as in a dream seeing two heads bent over him, but this evening he is wide awake, sits up-

right in bed, and mama gives a little cry at seeing him.

"What is the matter, darling?"

Papa thinks he knows. He says nothing, but mama thinks Trott must be sick. She questions him. Trott does not like to tell what is really the matter. There are things one does not say. They would make mama feel too badly. Finally he murmurs:

"I hear the sea too much. It frightens me."

Then mama sees how red her little boy's eyes are. She looks at papa, and, without a word being said, they all understand each other. All of a sudden a hideous blast howls at the window-panes, rushes down the chimney, and ends up in a sob. After this one can hear very plainly the dry, sharp grinding of the pebbles which the waves drag into the surf. Trott and mama burst into tears while papa smiles reassuringly. He bends down to kiss his little boy and murmurs jokingly:

"Weather is a little bad tonight, but a good sailor and a good ship pay no attention to a squall like this."

The door has closed behind them. Happy to have seen them, his heart no longer choking him since he has cried his fears all out, comforted by tender words, worn out by the unaccustomed wakefulness, Trott falls into a heavy slumber, in spite of the wind and the sea.

But in the morning his troubles come flooding back. He breakfasts mechanically, with no enjoyment. He does not listen to the expressive conversation of Mlle. Lucette. Papa

is going away. Unemotionally he sees Miss arrive. Papa is going away. Automatically he recites his lessons. Papa is going away. He looks out the window. It is still unpleasant outdoors though slightly less so than yesterday. Great clouds pursue each other across the sky like heavy birds. There are a few blue spots. The rain has stopped. Something like a ray of sunshine tries to emerge. That would be interesting if one were not so sad.

All of a sudden papa comes in.

"Would you like to take a walk with me before lunch? I have one or two errands."

In spite of his grief, Trott is enchanted. It is a rare treat to go out with papa. At this juncture it is more priceless than ever.

Topped with his beret and almost buried under his reefer, Trott walks at his father's side. The sky is quite free of clouds, and the sun is bright. It is going to be a fine day. Trott listens to papa explain to him a greater number of things that help a heartache. It seems first that two years on shipboard pass much more quickly than two years on shore. And furthermore, now that Trott is so much bigger and has so much more to do, the days will seem much shorter to him. Trott would have been skeptical about all this if it were not that it is papa who is saying it. Neither must he think that the life papa is going to lead is so terrible. There are storms, it is true, but not often, and almost none of them are so heavy as here on this coast. You merely shrug your

shoulders and pay no attention. Yes, but how about shipwrecks? Shipwrecks, they never happen. They happen only to small boats, not to big warships. That may be true, but when there is war, you are apt to get hurt, badly hurt. Oh, they seldom make war now-a-days. And, besides, hasn't papa got his sword and the big cannons on the ship? Of course they would win. All true enough, true enough . . . And then, there are marvelous countries to be seen, and men with skins of all colors, exquisite fruits, astonishing flowers, glittering birds, and quantities of animals of all kinds. Isn't all that very wonderful?

The clouds are swept away. The sky is almost all blue. On the horizon there is just the tiniest little black stripe.

Trott enthusiastically declares, "When I am big, I want to be a sailor."

Papa smiles. There are many things in his smile, things which happily Trott cannot decipher. Terrible shadows arise in his memory—oh, no, Trott shall not be a sailor! Papa picks up the conversation. All during the walk, except for a few stops at stores, he tells Trott one interesting thing after another. He will write very often, yes indeed. By each mail. And when he comes back he will bring Trott a lot of things. Trott must write too, not long letters yet, since he is not yet an accomplished writer, but just notes to tell whether Lucette has been good and if Trott knows his lessons.

Yes, Trott will write. Even though it isn't much fun to

write, he will add a few lines in each of mama's letters. But all the same, it will not be like seeing each other every day and talking together. You can't say much on paper.

Trott and his father start back towards the house. The black stripe begins to climb higher in the sky. The sunshine begins to pale. A little while ago, as papa was telling his stories, it was bright. Then it was easy to believe it all. Now it is harder. At a turn of the road the sea appears. An ugly sea, with browns, purples, almost blacks in it, a sea which bursts here and there into a rage of white waves. It presages nothing good, and now, as he sees it, Trott feels an iron band around his heart.

Papa continues. Trott must be very good to everyone, and particularly to his mama. Because now he will be the only man in the house. The last time papa went away, Trott was still a baby. He couldn't be of much use to anyone. But now he must be mama's faithful companion. And papa will give her into his charge and little sister also, as he would to a friend, to another man. Can't he, Trott?

By this time the sky is almost black. Abruptly, the sun disappears and, equally abruptly, a high wind sweeps by, shaking the trees furiously, making the shutters bang, and it would have thrown Trott to the ground if it had not first thrown him flat against a wall.

Several drops of rain begin to fall. Trott's soul is again gripped by anguish and, when papa repeats his question, "Isn't it true, Trott, that now I can talk to you like a man?"

Trott, conscious of his weakness, conscious of how small he is before the fury of sky and life, cannot prevent himself from murmuring:

"Yes, papa, but you know I am so little yet. And so I need you to stay at home so much."

Papa squeezes his little companion's hand still harder. He sees, as if it had been spread out there before his eyes, all the loyal little soul, sincere but sadly frightened. Yes, it is true that Trott is still very small, that Lucette is much smaller, and that mama, too, tender and charming as she is, often finds herself in despair before the difficulties of life. Papa sighs. Still, he must go. Here is the garden gate. Torrents of rain pour down. While waiting for the door to be opened, papa says one thing more. "I know, Trott, that you are still only a very small man. But promise all the same to be a very fine little man."

And Trott promises in a deep and serious voice.

All day long, there are comings and goings through the house. Everyone is busy. There are open trunks here and there. All sorts of queer-looking bundles are scattered around. The maid passes by with papa's shirts and his suits. Lucette seeks adventure and comes to look into each trunk with the air of a connoisseur. She laughs, she chatters, she tumbles, she picks herself up, she laughs again. Jip also hurries about and goes sniffing into the corners as if he realized that some great change was about to take place.

And these two members of the family, the most humble, are probably the most useful and are doing the most good, for they are distracting the others. They make them laugh, get angry, scold; they force them to shake off for an instant the thought that presses upon them like heavy clouds which grow heavier with the waning day. Happily also, they have to hurry to finish the packing, to find various forgotten articles, to give certain necessary orders. Although at bottom he feels very sad, still Trott is aware of a degree of vanity when he is given the responsibility of finding something in the third bureau drawer, or when they intrust him with some instructions for Thérèse or Jane.

The hours roll by, hours which will not come again. The hands of the clock hasten on their journey. They are not very pleasant, those hours. Still, many a time they will be regretted. The trunks are packed. Tomorrow there will be nothing to do but to close them. All the necessary work is done. The sun has set. The storm has arisen anew. The wind cries out its menaces, and the rain rattles on the panes. All black, this night, which is going to be the last night, has descended upon the world.

They are all together by the fire; the lamp is lighted. Papa is sitting in his armchair. Mama is in a low chair, very close to him. Not far off, Trott is kneeling and Mlle. Lucette is promenading slowly hither and yon. She talks amiably to the fire, utters a few remonstrances to the rain beating on the windows, and examines all corners of the

floor, eager to discover a pin or two or the end of a match. From time to time she runs up and tells some unintelligible tale. And Trott, in spite of himself, is always a little indignant at her lack of feeling.

But here is Nounou come to carry her upstairs. The habitual good-nights are exchanged with their usual joking. She is gone. Then, her babble stopped, the silence in the room becomes more painful. Papa looks pensively at the fire and tries to tell something that does not interest anyone very much. Leaning against him, mama murmurs very softly, but Trott cannot hear what she says. Trott himself, motionless, thinks that everything is very doleful but that papa and mama must feel even worse than he, because they are grown-ups. He reproaches himself for having pronounced a too hasty judgment on Lucette. She, who was so very little, knew how to distract them, while he, so much bigger, can think of nothing to console them. Now that he has been silent so long, it is harder than ever to find something to say. Yet he must find some sweet phrase, something that will give a little hope. . . .

Silently, papa thinks of those he is going to leave behind, of possible illnesses, of anxieties, of long days without news, of all the obscure possibilities of the future, of the return so far away and always doubtful. Silent and even more greatly tormented, mama thinks of the perils of the sea, of deaths, of scourging illnesses, of fevers, of all possible horrors, and all her visions end with the picture of a man in uniform who

comes to announce that one more officer will never return from the tropics. And the howling wind seems to snicker, "You are right."

A little voice breaks the silence:

"Isn't it fine that God is everywhere?"

Papa and mama look at each other with somewhat lessened pain; they remember Trott. They say, "Yes, my darling," and now they can again exchange some pallid words, in spite of the dizzying flight of the moments that will never return.

Chapter 26

MAMA, TROTT, AND LUCETTE



THERE is a void in the house.

There are moments when you do not notice it; nothing seems changed; everything seems to be going along as usual. Trott plays, Trott takes a walk, Trott has his regular lessons. Then all of a sudden, with no knowing why, something runs through you like a kind of dull or very bitter pain. It hurts terribly.

The other day Trott was at the dentist's because he has a lazy wretch of a tooth which should have come out long ago, but which obstinately hung on to the place where the pretty new teeth should by now have been. They took it out. It was terrible, but it lasted only an instant. Only, afterward, your mouth felt so funny! At times, of course, you didn't pay attention to it and forgot about it and then you could enjoy yourself as usual, but most of the time you felt uncomfortable with a sort of painful annoyance, and then suddenly, if something touched the poor sore gum, you felt

a piercing pain which made you want to scream and which filled your eyes with tears.

That's exactly how it has been since papa left, and yet it is three days already that he is gone. Will it be the same during all the next two years and more? Mama went with him as far as Toulon. She came back yesterday.

Oh! Trott's poor mama! How her face looked when she returned! Trott is not much of a physiognomist, yet anyone could see that she wanted only one thing, to cry with all her strength, to cry till she fell asleep with weariness and grief. Trott felt so unhappy. He would have liked to say, "Cry, poor little mama, cry all you want. Don't talk. That will do you good." But you can't say things like that, and mama didn't want to cry. She kept herself very busy talking, arranging things. Probably she had promised Trott's papa to be brave. She had tended to the details of the house and kept her accounts as usual. She had played with Mlle. Lucette. She had taught her a new game which the baby found highly amusing. You hide the ball in a rather easy place and she has to find it. Each time she does it, there is an explosion of joy. She had Trott say his fable. She had allowed him to play with his lovely new soldiers and had seemed to be interested in his games. But that wasn't what Trott wanted. He wanted to know whether his papa had got off all right; what had happened at the last minute; if he had said anything more, perhaps, about his little boy. Who knows what else he might have said? But of all that,

naturally, Trott daren't breathe a word. Perhaps later, if he waits a little . . . When you have a cut, as long as it bleeds you mustn't touch it. . . .

But most likely Trott's mother has seen that her little boy is absent-minded in the midst of his leaden soldiers; she has noticed his dreamy look and his glances which dared not question her. She has understood what was going on within him. So, that evening after dinner, before Trott went to bed, when they were sitting by the fireside (just like that other evening, but alas, with one less), she in a big armchair and Trott in his own little chair, she suddenly said:

"My little Trott, come here."

She opened her arms and motioned to him to climb on her knees as he used to do when he was very small. Then Trott rushed to her. He curled into a ball in the soft nest of her lap and prepared to listen with strained attention, guessing a little what he was to hear. . . .

And mama started to tell him. She told it in a very low, very sweet voice, not sad—no, really, you couldn't say sad—but strange, a little as though she were repeating a very difficult lesson she didn't know very well. From time to time she stopped to drop a kiss on her little boy's forehead, partly, perhaps, because her voice failed her. She told about the trip to Toulon, how they left the train, the noisy station, how they reached the dock from which they could see all the big boats swinging with the tide. She described papa's ship

with its two enormous smoke-stacks and its cannon in a sort of tower.

"Big cannon?" asked Trott.

Very big cannon. And then she had seen the captain of the ship, a fine gentleman, a little old with even more gold on his uniform than papa. And then she had visited papa's cabin. A very, very little room, where you could barely turn around.

"And then?" asked Trott.

And then there was one thing and another. She had gone all over the ship. It seemed very solid. Everything was shining with cleanliness. There were quantities of marines with glittering collars, and soldiers. It was a real city.

"And then?"

Well—mama gave Trott two or three little kisses, one after the other—well, then they had to say good-bye, you see—another kiss—and papa had gone with mama on to the bridge to the little staircase. And he had told her still more tender things for his little children, among others to hug them very hard for him, and there was a special message for Trott: that he should remember his promise. Trott was very much moved. To think that papa had still been able to think of *him* at the last moment. . . .

"And then?"

And then, mama had left the ship. Papa had not been able to take her to the shore because she had stayed on board

till the last minute and even longer. So she had gone down all alone into a little boat which was waiting and a few strokes of the oars had taken her to the land and her waiting carriage. Before getting in, she had turned around once more to see a white handkerchief waving. She would have liked to stay till the boat left, but papa had told her not to. So she had jumped into the carriage and very quickly, all alone, she had driven off and caught the train and come back to her little children.

Mama was silent. Trott didn't dare to look at her. . . . Most likely she was crying and she wouldn't like him to see her cry. So he thoughtfully looked at the fire where little red and yellow flames twisted and curled. And then he said to himself that, if his mama was very sad, now was the time or never for him to try to comfort her, since he had promised to be a brave little man. So he lifted his eyes.

Mama's eyelids are lowered, as though she were watching a crowd of things passing inside. But as soon as she feels the eyes of her little son upon her, she looks at him too, and smiles. Oh, what a woeful, what a desolate smile! As he looks at it, Trott has a terrible desire to break into tears.

But he must be a brave little man. He has promised. So he crowds back all the tears which are trying to come out and kisses his mother saying:

"I'll be so glad when we get papa's first letter."

Mama's voice is silent for a moment, then she says:

"Perhaps tomorrow morning papa's boat will pass within

sight of the coast. We'll go into my room, and I hope that with the spyglass we can see it."

This prospect is a joy tempered with sadness. The boat will be very far off. However, Trott is a little happy. It's something, at least, something unexpected. It will be like a last good-bye.

Trott goes to bed, and all night he has strange restless dreams; great ships with white sails flee into the distance with fantastic speed, and one vaguely sees men waving their handkerchiefs and disappearing.

In the morning Trott tears into mama's room almost before he is up. He says good-morning very quickly and questions her with a look. . . . Is it still too early?

The ship won't be in sight before ten or eleven o'clock. "I still have a letter or two to write which are pressing. I will call you as soon as the ship comes. As it is Thursday, you might play with Lucette while you're waiting."

Trott would have preferred staying near mama, awaiting with her the solemn moment when the ship would pass. He has a faint suspicion that perhaps these letters are just a pretext to send him off, but he can't insist. That might hurt mama. Above everything he must be very good and do as he should, so he goes off to carry out the task she has given him. Luckily it's not a very hard one.

Mlle. Lucette is aware of the fact that her person is the motive force of everything; that the aim of all creation is only to fulfill all her needs and whims. Doubtless this con-

ception is not clear, but the idea that anything outside of herself could have an independent existence would seem monstrous to her if she could manage to conceive of it at all. She is very uneasy if any of the slaves who surround her in the room where she happens to be occupy themselves with anything which is not directly profitable to her. She considers such an act as manifest usurpation, as an infringement of her rights, which are the primary laws of all activity. When Nounou tries to sew or mama to write in the spot which she honors with her presence, it goes very well as long as she doesn't notice that their attention is not completely absorbed in her person. But, from the moment she perceives that these secondary beings dare aspire to any private activity not directed at her personal needs, she immediately vows herself to the task of showing them the vanity of their pretensions. Physical violence, threats, bursts of temper, imprecations, smiles, wails, pleasantries, she spares nothing to attain her goal; unnecessary to add that she always attains it, and that Nounou, subdued, and mama, weakened, soon abandon their sewing or their letter-writing, surrendering their arms to the victor.

But, if Mlle. Lucette cannot bear to be neglected, one must also acknowledge that, from the moment that you devote yourself to her service, she becomes quite tractable, aside from certain periods of caprice, and willing to accept the entertainment you wish to offer. She is not one of these blasé people who pretend to have exhausted everything and

who, if you brought them the moon on a platter, would disdain it, saying, "I knew it. I have already seen it planted up there in the sky."

Mlle. Lucette is exuberantly interested in a multitude of things. Nature seems to her full of the most captivating miracles. She possesses talent in the highest degree, if by that we mean, with Tolstoy, the faculty of seeing everything from an original angle, differently from the ordinary crowd. A scrap of paper, if proffered in an acceptable way, can be for her the source of exquisite pleasure. You need only say, "Peekaboo," and "There she is," and she will go hide behind the chair fifty times and then come out and throw herself into the arms of her playmate. If you encourage her from time to time, she will in the same way consent to rub a marble indefinitely with a rag as she has seen Nounou do—but much longer. The world, both animate and inanimate, is full of resources and entertainment, but in order to appreciate them Mlle. Lucette requires the approbation of others to stimulate her activity. Even a slight help is enough, but it is necessary.

So Trott has no difficulty in fulfilling his task; he succeeds so well that Nounou can peacefully devote herself to the delicate work of darning a stocking. He begins by informing Lucette that pretty soon papa's ship will pass by. Lucette runs to the window, taps the pane, and then turns with twitters of happiness. She repeats this performance several times without tiring. Trott, seated on the floor, is

trying to draw the picture of the same ship with a stub of pencil. One cannot truthfully say it is a good likeness. The masts are a little lopsided and the ship itself seems to have a rather queer shape. However there is something about it. Perhaps Trott could ask mama to send it to papa by the next post. Meanwhile Mlle. Lucette has wearied of running to the window and she is trying to take possession of Trott's paper and pencil. Trott is a little humiliated at the scant respect she shows his art, but after all he realizes it is not perfect and generously lets it go. Mlle. Lucette occupies herself for a few moments scribbling with the pencil, then makes ready to swallow it, but Trott intervenes. Provoked, she tries the same trick with the paper, and Trott has to confiscate it also. She is going to be angry. . . . But no, for Trott has made a big ball of the paper and has thrown it at her nose. She is charmed by the extreme originality and incomparable drollery of this action. She stoops to pick up the paper and throws it into the air. Then Trott gets it and throws it again. Then it is her turn again. Who could think of a more amusing game? Little screams and bursts of laughter fill the room. Nounou finds the entertainment less gay, for from time to time her nose is hit by the ball, or her legs by Lucette, but her darning progresses in spite of it.

Suddenly mama's voice sounds from the adjoining room. She calls:

"Trott, you may come."

Trott trembles as though caught in a crime. How is it

possible, when your heart is so filled with sorrow, that you can forget it like that for such a long time? He is indignant with himself. Leaving Mlle. Lucette aghast just where she is, he rushes to his mother. She is sitting in the pink arm-chair by the window. She is looking through the spyglass at the great spreading sea. She says:

"Do you see that smoke over there?"

Trott looks at the whole horizon. At first he sees nothing. A radiant blue sky gleams on a spangled blue sea. It's lucky that the weather is so fine. It would have been terrible if the ship had passed in the midst of a storm. But where is the ship? There is a white sail but it is not that. . . .

Ah! yes! Trott begins to see something over there very far away. There is a tiny little column of pale smoke making a slanting line on the horizon. You can hardly see it. Just below, on the water, you can just guess that you see a little black point. How tiny it is!

"Mama, are you sure that it's papa's ship?"

Mama is sure. With her spyglass she can distinguish the heavy, iron-plated bulk. She recognizes the masts, the turrets, the smoke-stacks. She gives the glass to Trott. He would like to say he sees something, but, really, he can't, so he says:

"I'll wait till the ship gets a little closer."

Alas, it isn't going to come much closer.

"Then, mama, tell me everything that you see."

But mama won't be able to see much more than she sees

already, than Trott can vaguely surmise: a column of smoke above a little black speck with a couple of little twigs sticking up. That is all. It is very little. Trott knew that he wouldn't be able to see much, that of course he wouldn't be able to see his papa, that the ship would pass by too far away, but he kept hoping that perhaps by some chance, who knows, there might be a surprise. That little thing that you see so far away doesn't mean much to you. Sadly he watches the little speck which barely spots the immense ocean, the tiny smoke feather which barely tinges the infinite sky. It seems to be disappearing already. Mama's voice is flat when she says, "It is going away."

Her eyes glued to the glass, she leans forward motionless, and watches despairingly. That black speck in space, small as it was, was still a bit of the absent one. One could not see him, it is true, but one knew that he was there. One knew that he, too, was trying to see all of his home that he could. If the glass were better you could have seen him. In spite of the distance it was like sending him a last good-bye. He wasn't entirely lost on the infinity of waves. Afterward, when everything had disappeared, he would be wholly in the unknown, in the distance, in the torturing remoteness, and you wouldn't even know in what part of the immense waters your tender, doleful thoughts must go in search of him.

Trott has lost the black speck and the little column of smoke. A minute ago they disappeared behind the jutting

cliffs of the promontory. Then it was finished. In spite of her glasses, mama herself cannot see anything more, and Trott feels a great grief strangle him. He is losing sight of the one who was the strength of his weakness, his port of refuge against childish terrors, his rampart against all dangers, all fears, all menaces. And he feels so very small, much too small, before all the terrible unknown things of life which threaten. And yet he has promised to be a brave little man.

Mama lets the glass fall; there is no more smoke on the sea. Over the cliffs of the promontory there is only a little white mist. It is over. The last thread is broken. Mama puts the spyglass on the table and throws herself back in her arm-chair, and this time, in spite of her courage, two tears fall on her cheeks. Trott wants to comfort her but he can't. He knows that if he tries to say anything he will break into sobs too. He takes her hand and covers it with little kisses. A heavy black silence dwells upon the radiant sky and the shimmering sea.

But from the other side of the chair comes an uncertain little quavering voice:

"Mama, mama."

And there is Lucette's head. In his hurry, Trott had left open the door which connects the two rooms. Mlle. Lucette soon noticed it and, taking advantage of Nounou's inattention, she slid through the half-open doorway, softly, stealthily, knowing that she was doing something forbidden, at

once proud, ashamed, and dubious about her expedition. She stood looking silently at mama who didn't see her at all.

And what did she see on the grief-stricken face of her mama? What did she see? Nothing much perhaps; perhaps nothing at all. Perhaps she acted only mechanically as a cuddly little animal acts who wants to be petted. But it is also possible that she saw her mama's tears and obscurely felt that something was different. Perhaps, for the first time, a little corner of her heart, hitherto completely closed, has opened. Perhaps she has vaguely felt a tiny glow of a tender and very sweet emotion, the emotion which makes life tolerable, which sometimes soothes the despairing, which makes us share the sufferings of other suffering creatures even when we ourselves are not hurt.

Mama takes her on her knees, presses her against her heart, and covers her with kisses and tears. She needed kisses and tears so badly. Lucette has found what mama wanted. Trott is sitting at her feet, lovingly pressed against her, and, wounded, bruised, and desolate as she is, mama feels the great consolation that comes from little children. In comforting others they do not complain of their own griefs; they know nothing of suffering, death, or terrible things. It is their limpid hearts full only of love and pity which show them the way to those who are in need of love and pity. Their tenderness is the more serene and healing because it is not limned against black memories of the past nor black doubts of the future. There is nothing so sweet as their

simple kisses, the only things in the world, perhaps, in which there is no sadness, no fear, no bitterness, and no flavor of death.

Mama knows that she will not be alone during the long separation. Trott says to himself that, after all, if papa is gone, he will come back and, if Lucette is good, it will be easier to be a brave little man. Lucette looks joyfully at the sea and the sky, chirps a song at them, and then throws herself on her mother again to kiss her some more, thoroughly proud of her invention.

On the horizon, the last wisp of smoke has vanished behind the cliff. The little group is now all alone against the infinity of the sky, of the ocean, and of life.

THE END

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